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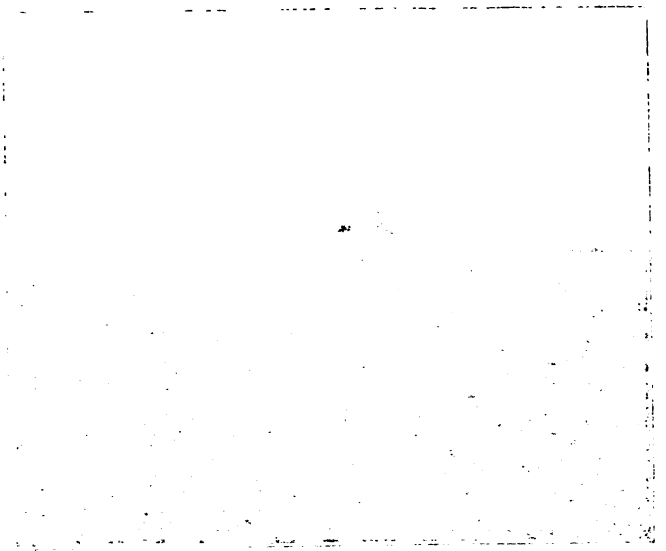

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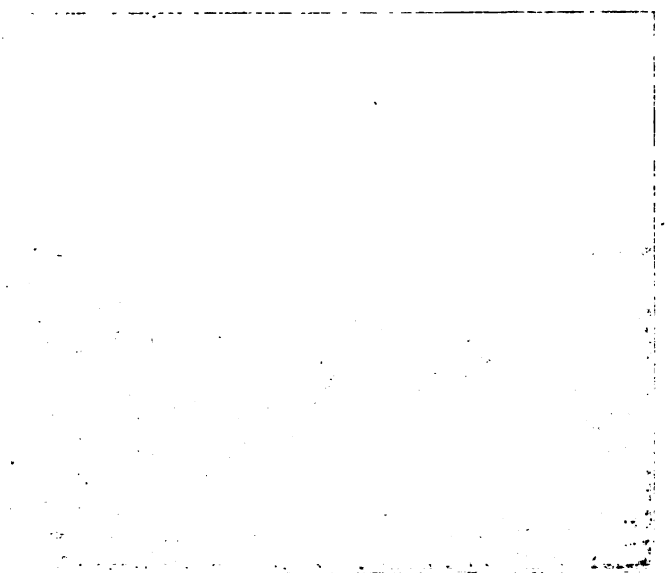

CAVALRY PATROL

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BY THE

HON. SIDNEY PEEL
BARRISTER-AT-LAW
LATE FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, OXFORD

FOURTH IMPRESSION

LONDON
EDWARD ARNOLD
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Dedication

My Dear ——

I have, without your permission, taken the liberty of dedicating this volume to you. In my brief military service I always found it better to do what I wanted without asking leave. It is very much easier to forbid a thing beforehand than to punish it afterwards, and if I had asked and you had refused, as I think you would have, I would have done it all the same, and then what becomes of discipline?

My Company was the 40th (Oxfordshire) Company, forming part of the 10th Battalion of Imperial Yeomanry. I remain inwardly convinced that it was the best Company of all the Yeomanry, though, unfortunately, I did not witness its best performance when it formed the van of the party that carried the hills at Hartebeestfontein against much superior forces in a strong position. But however that may be, and I would not think of openly insisting on the point, I suppose our experience is typical of the kind of work that the Yeomanry as a whole performed. Possibly other people writing

of the same events might give a more interesting and exciting account of them, but, after all, with very few exceptions, war is very interesting and exciting when you are going to it, and perhaps when you are talking about it afterwards, but not when you are there.

I might have been less diffident about asking your leave if I had been able to boast of ever having distinguished myself in the least. But I began and ended as nothing more than an ordinary trooper, and never attained to so much as the rank of lance-corporal. As for distinction, you must not judge hastily from the lists in the papers of "mentioned in despatches" and other honours, that the undistinguished were few in numbers; they were at least a sufficient multitude to make it no disgrace to be among them. As for rank, you must have privates; even in the Haytian army, in which they used to have two generals besides other officers to each man, there were at any rate some privates, and I know from my own experience that, when an order was given, no matter where it started, and through however many grades of officers, commissioned and non-commissioned, it was passed down, it was always the private who had to turn out and do something in the end. Collectively, indeed, privates are of the utmost importance.

I suppose that when we enlisted there were few

of us but had at the back of our heads some kind of visionary dream of an incredible transformation out of our ordinary selves, by virtue of which we should do heroic deeds upon the field of battle. If anything could effect such a transformation it would be fighting in line with such good comrades as I had. But, although such aspirations never came within a long distance of being realised for most of us, I hope you may be interested by this account of what we saw and did on the windy plains of South Africa.

To have been able to go at all was the most extraordinary piece of good luck that ever was. I would not have missed the months during which I wore her Majesty's uniform for anything in the world. When I think how many people have been drilling all their lives and could not go, while I, a mere civilian, with many others, went on active service without any of the bother of military education and peace training, I realise that we are much to be envied.—I am, yours,

S. P.

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The Illustrations are from Photographs taken by Mr. F. Hoare, *40th Company, I. Y.*

TROOPER 8008, I. Y.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

FEW who were in England at the time will forget the gloom of that black week in December, when the news of Magersfontein, Stormberg, and Colenso followed hard upon each other till the triangle of misfortune was complete. The thing became intolerable; it was impossible to go on doing the ordinary things of life; something had to be done; new men and new measures must be devised. So among many other measures, the Imperial Yeomanry was devised, and in six or seven weeks many a man, who had never had any idea of bearing arms, found himself sailing on a troopship to the Cape, clad in khaki, equipped as a mounted infantryman with many things both necessary and unnecessary.

The Imperial Yeomanry was really a corps of irregular horse, recruited in England, but at first the idea was that the force should be composed principally of already existing yeomanry corps, and that any vacancies left over should be filled by civilians who could pass the tests in riding and shooting. As it turned out, the numbers of

those who enlisted from existing yeomanry corps were small for reasons that can easily be understood, and the bulk of the Imperial Yeomanry were civilians. Perhaps fifteen per cent. were yeomen, and of these many had only undergone one or two trainings. I do not think that this was at all a misfortune; certainly I never detected any particular aptitude for active service in old yeomen. The yeomanry training has not usually hitherto been of so severe a character as to resemble real warfare in any degree. The yeomanry, too, are cavalry armed with carbine and sword; the Imperial Yeomanry were mounted infantry with rifle and bayonet, so that it was a positive advantage not to be acquainted with the cavalry drill and its differing words of command. It must of course have been very convenient to be able to make use of the yeomanry headquarters and permanent staff for purposes of recruiting and equipment, but if it had been clearly recognised from the first that the Imperial Yeomanry were an independent irregular corps, we might have been spared a certain number of officers, both commissioned and non-commissioned, who, with the best will in the world, had not, and could not be expected to have, any military capacity. To officer a newly raised body of 10,000 men was, however, certain to be a difficulty in any case, and the only solution that I can see is that the troops should have gone out without their full complement of officers, and trusted to selection from the ranks after a certain amount of experience. Irregular troops can get along with very few officers, for a

time at any rate, especially at first, when everybody is naturally keen to do their best. I sometimes used to think that we should do very well if the company adopted the democratic principle of electing its own officers, and I am quite certain that some of the officers we did have would have been almost unanimously elected. But that is not a suggestion for army reform.

Whatever were the intentions of the authorities, there could be little doubt that we were an irregular corps when we assembled for the first time in the appointed barrack-yard; a miscellaneous multitude of all ages from twenty to forty, with coats of every cut and every degree of newness or shabbiness. There were barristers, solicitors, blacksmiths, cooks, bankers, farmers, land-agents, schoolmasters, architects, clerks, horse-dealers, publicans, auctioneers, grooms, ex-soldiers, butchers, drapers, ranchers and cowboys, civil servants, and many more both high and low, men of all classes, professions, and trades, and men of none. How could such diverse materials ever be welded together? The sergeant-major who had charge of us might well have despaired of his task; but he was a stout fellow, undisturbed by any imaginings; recruits were recruits, and must be taught to know their place, and be filled with the fear of sergeant-majors. His words were few, but those strong, and full of portent for the future. "Wait till I catches yer on board ship," he would say to a refractory trooper, "then I'll——" The boldest might well quail before such unexpressed terrors and the piercing glance which accompanied this awful threat. But

in the end we never filled up the blank, for he was left behind to drill more recruits, and another less tremendous took his place. Unfortunately some irreverent person nicknamed him "the Bluebottle," on account of the uniform he wore, and then the spell was somewhat broken. It was only when we got our uniforms of khaki serge and Bedford cords that inequalities began to vanish. Uniform has an amazingly levelling effect. Diverse as were the composing elements of our company, when the men were once marshalled in sections and subsections, dressed all alike in slouch-hats, tunics, breeches, and gaiters, externally at least we had put on the appearance of soldiers, we felt that for the time the distinctions of the past had been removed; a common object bound us together. Every man would be judged henceforth by his fellows for what he really was. As yet we knew nothing of each other. The whole thing reminded me strongly of the first days I spent at school: there was the same sudden plunge into utterly new surroundings, new companions, new discipline, and a new mode of life. Looking back, it is curious to think how my first impressions of my comrades have been modified by the touchstone of active service: some, who in these first days were prominent among their fellows, self-confident and self-assertive, seem to have faded and withered up altogether; while others, who were hardly noticed then, developed under stress into men of stout heart and good courage, whom I would be proud to have as comrades in any adventure upon earth. But some were consistent enough; I remember one, who was a most

accomplished braggart, a real fire-eater, anxious to encounter the most tremendous odds in action. By all the rules such a loud talker should have turned out but a faint doer, yet in the end he proved to be not only very daring and cool under fire, but also resourceful and reliable in all the innumerable matters relating to the tending of horse and man, which make up by far the greater part of campaigning.

As for the motives which caused these men to volunteer, if you could believe what they told you about themselves or about each other, they were as diverse as the men themselves. The time was one of crisis, and popular enthusiasm and excitement had risen to a pitch hardly credible now, yet I only remember one man who declared that he had enlisted from reasons of patriotism, and he was generally regarded as peculiar. If others were so influenced, they would by no means confess to it. Some came because they saw a chance of emigration at Government expense; some for love of sport and excitement; some, because their domestic affairs were in a tangle, from which enlistment offered a ready escape; some, because they were tired of their present occupation; some, because they wanted a job; some, because they wanted a medal, and some because others came. But whatever their motives were, the men were there in abundant numbers, and had repeatedly to be thinned out before the company was reduced to its official number of 121 of all ranks.

A month elapsed between our first assembling and our embarkation. Naturally the attention of

the authorities was chiefly taken up with details of organisation and equipment, and considering the shortness of the time a wonderful work was accomplished. But of field training there was little. We were examined by doctors; we were measured and weighed; we were placed in rows, and taught to march in more or less serpentine formations. Attempts were made to show us the difference between right and left, and to instil into us the elements of musketry drill. On hot days we executed some very indifferent manœuvres at the double in greatcoats, and on cold ones we were repeatedly photographed without them. Before we started we were able to perform some parade-ground movements, and to present and shoulder arms in a manner calculated to disarm the envy of the most inefficient battalion of volunteer recruits. We were taken up to Albany Barracks to display our newly won accomplishments before the Prince of Wales: fortunately for our reputation it was decided that we should be placed in position before the inspection began, and stand to attention until it was over, so that we emerged from the ordeal with some credit. The one piece of drill which we thoroughly mastered was standing at ease and standing easy; all other words of command were accompanied by a vast deal of whispered discussion in the ranks as to their meaning.

Presumably this process of "messing about" was of some use in instilling discipline, that mysterious shibboleth of the regular soldier, but we should have very much preferred to have acquired it in learning something of practical use. There

are two primary essentials for a mounted infantryman on active service; first he must understand his horse, he must be able to saddle up in a moment, he must be able to mount and dismount in full marching order with ease and rapidity, and he must be able to manage at least three led horses besides his own; secondly, he must understand his rifle, and be a good shot. The necessities of campaigning will soon teach the first, though previous knowledge is very desirable; the second can only be acquired by previous training. In the first of these essentials we had a little, only a very little training; I believe some companies of yeomanry had none at all; the difficulty of obtaining horses was probably the reason. But in the second we had absolutely none. It is true that all the men had to pass the ordinary yeomanry first-class test; *i.e.* to score 50 out of 84, firing seven rounds standing and seven kneeling at 200 yards, and seven lying down at 500 yards. Such a test—and even this was not rigidly enforced—hardly proves more than that the man can shoot in the required direction. With the easy-shooting and accurate Lee-Enfield it was not easy to fall below the standard, with an enormous target staring you in the face at point-blank range. Not more than five or six of my company had ever shot at anything else than a target, or at uncertain ranges; most had never fired a rifle before in their lives. But for some reason or other we were given no practice at all, and most of us never discharged the rifles we carried in the field, until we fired them at the enemy. I never heard any other explanation offered

but that it was impossible to obtain ammunition. However that may be, I am certain that the weak point of most of the Imperial Yeomanry was their shooting.

In all the duties that we had to perform in the field, outpost work, flanking patrol, advance guard, scouting and the rest, we received no preliminary instruction whatever, probably because there was no one competent to give it, if indeed it ever occurred to anybody that we should be so employed. One lecture upon the work of mounted infantry was indeed attempted, but in the light of after-events I cannot suppose that the excellent gentleman who delivered it had had any experience of active service, for his remarks depended entirely upon the assumption that the enemy's position and numbers would be fully known, and that they would remain passive whilst the attack was being developed, conditions which were seldom or never fulfilled. Beyond this our instruction was principally confined to a number of speeches from various distinguished persons, who constantly urged us to be careful in saluting officers, congratulated us on our success in obtaining a job, and particularly warned us that we were not going upon a picnic, till at last, though I believe none of us entertained any such notion originally, we were nearly persuaded that it was so.

After all, it did not perhaps matter very much, except in the matter of shooting, what training we received. We had two great advantages—the men as a whole were of fine physique, and they were enthusiastic, and keenly eager to learn. We were

fortunate enough to escape paying any serious penalty for our ignorance, and there is no teacher like experience. Yet, unquestionably, to place so untrained a force in the field was a dangerous experiment, and though it may be said to have been justified by results, nothing but the most urgent necessity could justify its repetition.

CHAPTER II

THE START

AFTER some disappointments and vexatious delays we at last found ourselves under orders to sail from the East India Dock on 3rd February. By way of preparing us for the campaign we were ordered to parade at 3 A.M., mounted and in full marching order. A more inauspicious night could not be imagined. It was snowing hard and bitterly cold. But nothing could damp the enthusiasm of the City folk. With bands and with torches they escorted us to the station, and defied both the hour and the weather with undaunted cheerfulness. At last, after three or four hours' confusion in the dark, we somehow got packed into the train, horses, kit, and men, cold and wet, but excited. At the docks it was very different; our embarkation was superintended by men who understood their business, and in a wonderfully short time our horses were stalled on board, kit, saddlery, and arms were stowed away in their appointed places, and we were ready. Then came last telegrams, a last good-bye or handgrip from friends who had braved the bitter north-easter that was whistling dismally about the sheds, and we were off.

Many of us had looked forward with some apprehension to the voyage on a troopship, and certainly

the first view of the troop-decks in which we were to live and sleep, down underneath two decks of horses and mules, was not very encouraging. The troop-deck was the whole width of the ship, and from the sides projected long tables and wooden benches; those who were allotted to a table slung their hammocks from the hooks overhead, and it was a curious sight at night to see over two hundred hammocks in one cabin swinging with the motion of the ship, and occasionally bumping against each other. It takes time to get accustomed to a hammock, but sea air and regular employment are good sedatives, and the swinging hammock is a good preventative of sea-sickness. Every man took his turn to be mess orderly to his table. His duties were to bring down the rations from the cook's or baker's galleys, to lay the table, and wash up afterwards—this last a most unpleasant job. I shall always have a sincere sympathy for scullions. On the whole, long as the journey was—we took over three weeks to reach Cape Town—I never enjoyed a sea voyage more in my life. Everything had the charm of novelty; and new as was the present, the future loomed before us still more mysterious and unknown, adding a glamour to even the most commonplace duties of a sea-borne trooper.

Our day's routine was regular enough. At 5.30 A.M. we were roused by the discordant blasts of a bugle or trumpet; any sort of garments were hastily pulled on, hammocks were rolled up and put away. The next two hours were spent in watering and feeding the horses, cleaning out their

stalls, grooming them, or swilling the decks with water. After "stables" there was a rush to get some kind of a wash with the very inadequate means provided, and then came breakfast at 8.30. At 10 A.M. we had a formal parade in full dress, and at 11 A.M. there was usually parade for exercising horses. Large rope mats had to be hauled out and laid along the iron decks, and the horses brought out of their stalls and led up and down in batches. I was always very glad when this was over; it is wearisome work to lead a horse up and down, up and down, with no other diversion than having your toes trampled on or being kicked, and further, though it is generally easy to take a horse out of his stall, it is not always so to put him back. At 12 o'clock horses were again watered and fed; at 1 came dinner; at 4 P.M. stables again; and at 5 tea. Other duties had to be performed at different times, *e.g.* cleaning saddlery or arms, bringing up forage from the hold, and, of course, the usual sentry-goes. We enjoyed a good deal more freedom than is usual on a regular troopship, and I think that we were somewhat better fed. During the hot weather we were allowed to take our hammocks and sleep on deck, and a large sail was spread out, filled with sea-water, and used as a bath; it was generally desirable to get to it as early as possible, for there was naturally a good deal of competition. Otherwise washing accommodation was not very great.

So the time passed; there were two breaks in our seclusion from the world. First we put in at Las Palmas, and, though none of the men were allowed

to land, great excitement was caused by the swarm of boats which immediately surrounded us with fruit, tobacco, parrots, and monkeys for sale. Many of my companions had never before been outside an inland English county, and their amazement and delight at these new spectacles and the strange jargon of the boatmen was very pleasant to behold. One man bought a monkey in the first flush of enthusiasm; it was eventually presented to the C.I.V. Battery which accompanied us on board ship, and more fortunate than some, it has survived the perils of campaigning and returned to a secure retreat in the London Zoo. We had left England soon after Spion Kop, and naturally we were madly anxious for news. I eagerly questioned our officers on their return from shore, but at first could get nothing beyond, "Oh, there was a long telegram, but I forget exactly what it said." More definite information arrived, however, the next time we came in contact with the outer world. Some days from the Cape we passed a homeward-bound steamer. It slowed down, and hung a great white board over the side. Never shall I forget the intensity with which we watched the black letters forming themselves on the white background: "French has relieved Kimberley." Cheer after cheer broke out from our crowded sides, and was taken up by the other ship. Then it passed on, and we were left to speculate on this bald announcement, so startling and unexpected. When at last we reached Cape Town even more startling news awaited us: "Roberts has surrounded Cronje and a large force of Boers at Paardeberg."

We lay for two days in Table Bay before we were able to land, so great was the press of shipping. I have never seen so impressive a witness to the greatness of the Empire; after weeks of travelling over a lonely and unfrequented ocean to find at the other end of the world scores and scores of great ships collected from all parts of the globe, all flying the Union Jack, was a sight to rouse the pride of the most stolid individual. And there, towering above us, was the familiar steep of Table Mountain, with its folds of white cloud rolling over and over, known as the Tablecloth, which always hangs about the flat top when there is wind. All day the sun blazed down upon us, till our iron decks became well-nigh insufferable, and every evening at sunset there sprang up a strong south-west wind, which got stronger and stronger till about 2 A.M., when it was blowing a hurricane, and then gradually subsided into a perfect calm just as dawn was rising. I was on sentry our last night on board, and glad I was, for the changing lights, as the dawn came up, upon Table Mountain was one of the most beautiful sights imaginable, and more than compensated for a watchful night. I had never realised before that Table Bay and Cape Town itself lie on the north side of Table Mountain, but of course in the southern hemisphere the northern is the sunny side.

At last our turn came to disembark, and we drew up alongside the quay. That day began at 5 A.M., and was one of the longest and most tiring I ever remember. All day was spent in landing our horses, carrying on shore our kit and saddlery,

ammunition, stores, tents, and so on; all this in full marching order, that is, carrying rifle, belt, and bayonet, water-bottle, haversack, bandolier, and greatcoat. Late in the afternoon all was ready, and we marched off, dragging our horses, weak from the long voyage, along the six dusty miles that lead to Maitland Camp. There, weary and hungry, we spent our first night on African soil.

CHAPTER III

MAITLAND CAMP AND DE AAR

We spent about four days at dusty Maitland. Though some of the views are fine, the camp itself was not a very agreeable place. The dust pervaded everything. You ate it, drank it, and slept in it, and as water was scarce and time for washing still scarcer until the evening, the men soon began to lose the clean, washed-up appearance which had distinguished them in England. Much time was spent in drilling us in the parade-ground style, and in grooming our horses and arranging and cleaning our saddlery in the orthodox home yeomanry fashion. It seemed as though we were busy being trained for a grand march past and inspection at Pretoria. The sun took the skin off our noses, necks, and arms, and altogether we prayed heartily for orders to move up country.

There were at Maitland Camp besides ourselves one or two field batteries, some Australian mounted infantry, some cavalry, and several other companies of yeomanry. A good deal of confusion seemed to prevail; we shifted our camp no less than twice during the few days we were there, for no reason that could be observed. The other three companies of our battalion had a curious experience. They were landed at Cape Town and

marched out to Maitland. Once there, they were immediately marched back again, and put on board another ship with all their horses and kit; then they were disembarked once more, and finally were again embarked on the original ship which had brought them out, and so taken on to East London. I suppose some amateur staff officer had blundered. One very amusing feature of Maitland Camp was the immense number of yeomanry sentries who met you at every turn. After dark all over the camp you would constantly hear, "Halt! who goes there?" "Friend," you would answer judiciously, and the sentry, satisfied with this ambiguous reply, would usually give a sonorous, "Pass, friend, and all's well." But on some nights orders were apparently stricter, and I remember once being arrested seven or eight times in the course of the evening. I escaped every time by giving my name and address, which the sentry took down as well as he could in the dark, and I never heard anything more of it.

Our time was enlivened by the news of Paardeberg and the relief of Ladysmith, and great discussions took place as to whether we should ever see any fighting, but very soon, more fortunate than many who spent long weeks at the base, we received orders to go down to Cape Town and entrain. That was a day of tremendous packing. We had been coached on board ship in the method of packing the things we were to carry on our persons or our saddles when in full marching order. I do not know who was the authority that devised the official list; he

cannot have known much about the conditions of active service. It is worth while to give the order as we received it.

First, we were to wear upon our own persons—

Helmet	Haversack (containing field service cap and balance of day's rations)
Serge tunic	
Breeches	
Leggings	Water-bottle } on right side
Boots	Field-glasses }
Spurs	Bandolier holding 100 rounds
Shirt	Bayonet with scabbard
Drawers	Belt and frog
Socks	Rifle with sling, pull-through, and oil-bottle
Cholera-belt	
Braces	Pocket-knife and lanyard
Jersey	Field dressing and description card

Secondly, we were to carry on our saddles—

In near Wallet.	*In off Wallet.*
Horse-brush	Shirt
Curry-comb	Towel
Sponge	Soap
Rubber	Pair of socks
Pair of drawers	Pair of bootlaces
Tin of grease	Housewife
Emergency ration	Worsted cap
Selvette cloth and rag for rifle-cleaning	Hold-all (containing knife, fork, spoon, razor, comb, and shaving-brush)
One canvas shoe	One canvas shoe

In front of the saddle was to be strapped one blanket, rolled up with a pair of khaki fatigue trousers inside, so as to make a roll 40 inches long. On the top of this was to go the rolled greatcoat. One boot was to be fastened on to each wallet, and outside this, on the near wallet,

the mess-tin. Behind the saddle was to go a roll consisting of the waterproof sheet, containing one serge tunic and one pair of breeches, the whole to be 26 inches long. On the top of this there were to be fastened on one pair of hay-nets, two stout pegs (iron-shod) for picketing, one built-up rope, one heel-rope, and a saddle-sack, with the nose-bag, folded in a peculiar manner when empty, hanging from the near side.

The surcingle-pad to go underneath the horse's belly on the surcingle.

Anything else was to be carried in our kit-bags separately.

Here was a burden for a horse to carry; and when I add that our saddles were of an old type and very heavy, and that our bits and bradoons were of the stoutest kind imaginable, any one would think that we were intending to ride shire horses instead of 13–14 hand cobs. The total weight of all this could not have been far short of eleven or twelve stone, to be added to the weight of the rider as he stood. Yet that was the equipment, under which we were apparently expected to march by the home authorities.

The day of packing was a day of despair. I laid out all those innumerable articles, and gazed at them sadly; at last, after several hours' conscientious adherence to regulations—for at that time we were still innocently obedient to the letter of our orders—I managed to roll, strap, and fasten everything together in some sort of a fashion; I further folded up the saddle-blanket, which goes between the saddle and the numnah, and successfully planted

the whole thing upon my staggering beast. But here a new difficulty awaited me. How would I ever be able, rifle in hand and encumbered by haversack, water-bottle, and glasses, to climb over that monstrous rear-pack, bristling with pegs and ropes, into the saddle? and once there, how could I ever dismount? I was filled with the gloomiest forebodings; if it took me several hours to saddle up, if I could only mount after a prolonged struggle, and once mounted, could not again dismount, what possible use should I be against an active and enterprising foe? I was only consoled by the obvious fact that the rest of my comrades would be in similar difficulties.

We paraded, and the word was given to mount. A scene of wild confusion ensued. Many a saddle slipped round, a good many horses did not understand that they ought to stand still while the rider was climbing into his seat, things that appeared to be securely fastened incontinently dropped off and had to be picked up, and a great deal of strong language flew about. After about a quarter of an hour, by dint of great exertions and the aid of some friendly spectators, the order was obeyed, and we marched off to Cape Town station. As for myself I managed to mount unaided, but dismount I could not, until I got some one to push my leg over the rear-pack for me.

After a great struggle, horses and men and most of their kit were got into the train, and we began our northward journey—we knew not whither. After the long duties of Maitland Camp, two days and nights in the train seemed most comfortable

and resting. It soon began to be rumoured that we were going to Naauwpoort, and this rumour, unlike many others, turned out to be partly true, for that was our destination, though we did not reach it. On the road we passed many train-loads of Boer prisoners from Cronje's army, going down to Cape Town. In the afternoon of the second day we reached De Aar, and here we were suddenly ordered out of the train, and told that we should be wanted immediately. We set to work and got out our horses and saddles and kit; but it turned out that nothing was required of us that evening. As we were not expected to disembark there, we were unable to get anything to eat from the military stores, as the issuing hour was in the morning. On trying the refreshment-room at the station, I was turned out by an indignant proprietor as being a common soldier. I could not deny it, and, though my reason rebelled against a hungry man of whatever rank not being allowed to buy food when there was food to be got, there was nothing to be done.

It turned out that a short time before Paardeberg, some rebels at Prieska, which lies about 120 miles to the west of De Aar on the Orange River, invited the Boers to send a force down to them, and promised a very large number of recruits, about 700. A small force did come down with a couple of guns, under command of a Free Stater called Scouttar; they were joined by a few rebels, but probably not more than 100, and, advancing towards Britstown, had met and repulsed a small force chiefly consisting of C.I.V. infantry and mounted infantry. They were thus threatening

the line of communications, and considerable alarm was also felt lest the rising so begun should spread down into the heart of the colony with serious results.

This we did not know at the time, but we prepared for a few days' campaigning. I need hardly say that all the elaborate packing of the saddle was at once discarded. We only carried great-coat and waterproof sheet besides any little articles that we could stuff into our wallets; we did not, of course, take any change of clothes. Though we expected to be only about three days out, it was really three weeks before we returned to De Aar, and these three weeks, though we had no actual fighting, taught us a great many valuable lessons.

CHAPTER IV

THE PRIESKA CAMPAIGN

THE next afternoon we started for Britstown. The distance is not really more than one long day's march, but we had to take a convoy drawn by donkeys—as other beasts of draught had become so scarce—the slowest and most tedious of all methods of carriage, and accordingly we made two marches of it. Those two days' march were very trying; our horses were still suffering from the effects of the sea voyage and two days on the train; the weather was intensely hot. We ourselves were, of course, totally inexperienced, and felt the weight of our bandolier full of cartridges, our water-bottles and haversacks, to be no inconsiderable burden. Our first bivouac was at a desolate farm called Spruefontein. It was pitch-dark and raining when we got in, and, tired as we were, I do not know how the horses got tied up and fed. Our uneasy slumbers were considerably disturbed by one of our sentries, who declared he could hear Boers whistling, and thought he saw a man. But the man turned out to be a bush, and the whistler was a whistling plover, with whose weird and melancholy note we afterwards became extremely familiar.

Next day, thirteen hours of tedious marching,

for the donkeys could not travel more than a quarter of an hour without a halt, brought us to Britstown. We were now on the Karoo, which stretches for hundreds of miles, bleak, desert, and stony, covered with the little karoo bushes, which look as if nothing would thrive on them; nevertheless it is a land of sheep and ostriches, and not at all so poor as it looks. It was a terrible country to ride over, scouting for an enemy who never appeared, in the burning heat, and I several times that day felt, that if anybody had offered me a jug of water, warranted full of fever microbes, I would have drunk it gladly. The spire of the Dutch church at Britstown showed clearly for miles, and mocked us for several hours with a delusive nearness. It was our first experience of the clear South African atmosphere.

At Britstown we found some companies of the C.I.V.'s, full of tales about their recent engagement. More mounted men, Yeomanry, Kitchener's Horse, Regular Mounted Infantry, Australians, and the 7th Dragoon Guards came in during the next day or two, and to our great astonishment Lord Kitchener himself came down from the main army. Under his command we pushed on vigorously past Houwater, where Mr. Rhodes has an experimental irrigation farm, near the scene of the C.I.V. engagement, to Omdreivlei, which has a post-office and a store. But the Boers had been before us; the post-office was wrecked, the telegraph wires were curling unconnectedly all about, the insulators had been used as targets, and, worst of all, the store was empty. One thing, however, was left,

the great dam, which made the place an ideal camping-ground, and the spring of drinking-water near by, which, though exceedingly froggy to the taste, was not unwholesome. Never was the Thames at Athens or at Boveney Weir ever half so delightful as the plunge into those yellow waters after a long and dusty march.

The enemy were now reported to have retreated to Prieska, and this was confirmed by a strong patrol of Australians and Yeomanry which pushed out some fifteen miles as far as a strong pass on the road. We took a prisoner or two and a few rifles that day, but there was no trace of the main body of the enemy. Coming home that day we had a great find, a store which still contained a few pots of treacle, and a few bottles of beer. I with a few more had been left behind as rearguard of the returning patrol under charge of a corporal. The stricter discipline of the main body commanded by officers had passed the place untouched, but we disregarded the protests of our unhappy corporal, and soon bought up the storekeeper's remaining stock. A bottle of beer more than appeased the corporal's wrath, and we straggled home in rather an unmilitary manner, but it was pleasant; for in those days discipline was still rather strict; our officers were still trying to turn us into regular troops, and consequently made us work far harder than regulars ever did. Every afternoon after the day's march they would keep us polishing bits and irons and performing other equally useless tasks till there was very nearly a mutiny; the sergeant-major, too, was in the first flush of

authority, and determined to show us that he would be obeyed. But we wore them down eventually.

The day after the reconnaissance mentioned we started again, and it soon became known that the mounted men were going right through to Prieska, forty-two miles off. The last thirty miles were done at a very quick rate, without a halt; it was a terribly trying day for the horses. A great part of the column rode in close order along the road for the sake of greater speed; the heat was intense; and the dust rose up so thick that you could scarcely see the man who rode next to you, and the horses could not see the ground. The dust was in eyes, mouth, and ears, but we were buoyed up by the hope that the enemy would at last make a stand; the excitement grew as we neared Prieska, but in vain, we rode in unmolested, for the enemy were too weak to stand against us and vanished. We heard afterwards that they were in evil plight not far off, but our own horses were sadly in need of rest; thirty-seven out of the whole column had dropped dead on the road, and others were not very much better. Next day another column under General Settle, which had had some fighting, came in, and altogether the rebellion was evidently at an end for that time at any rate.

Prieska lies on the Orange River, which there very much resembles the Tweed, and from its banks has a homelike look. We were glad to have a bathe and to wash our clothes, which they sadly needed. In an hour or so the hot sun completely dried them.

The first night at Prieska, the rain, which we should have so gladly welcomed a few hours before, descended upon us in torrents, and indeed continued to do so during nearly all the time of our return to De Aar, a six days' march. Under such conditions campaigning is indeed most miserable work. The camp-fire will not burn, and you gaze moodily at the damp ground, wondering whether to unroll your blanket or to keep it dry if possible a little longer. At last you turn in, and draw your waterproof sheet over as much of you as you can, and perhaps succeed in going off to sleep. But soon a cold sensation in the region of your back rouses you to the fact that you are lying in a pool of water. For some time you bear it, but at last it becomes intolerable, and you get up to try and find some shelter. Every vacant space under a waggon or cart or a chance shed has been long ago occupied, and you return more soaked and miserable than ever to try your damp pool again—not for long, sleep is impossible; you wander about or crouch under your sheet, and wish for dawn. By that time everything is a sea of mud, from which you fish out your saddle and bridle, and put them on your horse, feeling gloomily certain that the wet numnah will give him a sore back. But joy cometh in the morning. When the sun gets up your wet clothes dry, your spirits rise again, and despondency vanishes; and once dry you can endure anything. So we came back again to De Aar, but different men from what we were when we started. We felt now that we were no longer complete novices, we were quick and handy with our horses;

and, speaking for myself, in spite of all discomforts, wet blankets and sleepless nights, half rations, and dirty water, I never felt better and stronger in my life. Our point of view was changed; never have I eaten anything more delicious than some plates of bread and butter at De Aar, which one of our officers thoughtfully provided for us; I shall always think kindly of him for it.

CHAPTER V

BOSHOF

At De Aar we were entrained the same evening for Kimberley, where we arrived in the morning, and after a good deal of delay were marched off to Carter's Farm, where our camp was to be, near the Boer trenches, the scene of fierce fighting during the siege. Hither some of our company had preceded us and pitched our tents, but when we arrived our sergeant-major perceived that the poles of some of the tents were about two feet out of the straight line, and ordered us immediately to strike tents and reset them. To a weary volunteer such an order seemed mere waste of time and energy, and I remarked to him as he passed my tent, "Sergeant-Major, don't you know that this kind of thing is the ruin of the army?" With a sudden burst of angry candour he replied, "Do you think I have been in the army all my life without finding that out? but you must do it all the same." Of tents pitched right or wrong we made, however, little use; it is far pleasanter to sleep in the open than in a crowded stuffy tent, with twelve or thirteen men squeezing and shoving about you. There is no more delightful hour of the day than when you wrap your blanket round you and lie down to smoke a last pipe against the

starlight. As you lie on your back with your head upon your saddle or your haversack, gazing at the mysterious gap in the starry heaven called the Coal-sack, hard by the Southern Cross, your thoughts wander over the vast spaces of sea and land to those whom you have left and may never see again. You forget that you are a common soldier bound to obey this man and that; for the day your work is done, for a little while you are your own man again; to-morrow we shall be marching, working, fighting, or God knows what. But that's to-morrow, and beyond our control. So you can afford to enjoy the freedom of your thoughts, for sleep will come in a moment, whenever you turn quietly over and call for it. Then in the morning you awake fresh and keen and vigorous in a moment.

After a day or two at Carter's Farm we moved across Kimberley to Dronfield on the north, an unpleasant camp enough, dusty and waterless. From Dronfield we made a three days' march to Boshof, our first incursion into the enemy's territory. The country between Kimberley and Boshof seemed most attractive to us after the desolate Karoo. Here is true veldt affording good pasturage, and in many parts pleasantly wooded, though with no great variety of trees beyond the thorns. We saw a good deal of game, several kinds of antelope, including the now not very common hartebeest, the kurhaan, a sort of bustard, partridges or francolins, and hares. Other birds and animals abounded. We saw for the first time the quaint Secretary bird, stalking along in its grotesque un-

gainly fashion as if fully conscious of its legal rights, the weaver birds that hang their bottle-shaped nests by dozens in the thorn-trees, coots, plovers, pigeons, larks, starlings, and many more whose names were unknown to me, besides a whole army of vultures. There were colonies of meerkats, both the large and small variety, whose burrows make the veldt bad going for inexperienced horses. More dangerous still are the great holes made by the ant-bears. A native-born pony will avoid any dark or suspicious-looking spot as by instinct, and will even pass a hole in a moment without pressure of rein or leg, but an English horse, fresh from smooth pastures or hard roads, will put his nose in the air and give his rider tumble after tumble, unless he keeps a constant lookout for holes, which is not consistent with good scouting; for the outriders ought to keep all their vigilance for the enemy or any sign of him. Here, too, we came upon that constant feature of the African landscape, the millions and millions of ant-hills, all of the bee-hive shape, perfectly hard and weather-proof, without any visible entrances aboveground. However deserted they looked, I have never opened one without finding it swarming with multitudes of pale-coloured insects, such as you never see aboveground. Most extraordinary of all were the stupendous flights of locusts. It is impossible to exaggerate the effect of these insects. You see them rising on the horizon like a great cloud, then they advance, at first a few scattered skirmishers, then gradually thickening till the whole sky is literally darkened by them,

and the sound of their wings is like a great wind blowing steadily, and so they stream on for hours. When they settle, they cover every inch of the ground. I have ridden through a swarm of them for miles and miles; they keep rising up in waves from under the horse's feet as though he were splashing through shallow water. In the morning when they cannot fly, because their wings are still wet with the dew, the ground has the appearance of boiling, from the short flights or leaps they keep taking to try their wings; then as the sun gets hotter they take larger and larger flights till at last the whole swarm lifts itself up, and moves to fresh pastures.

Boshof, so called after a former president of that name, is a pleasant little town flanked by some small kopjes at either end in the middle of a large plain. As usual with Dutch towns it is completely dominated by its large church, the only building of any architectural pretensions. Otherwise its low, flat-roofed, whitewashed houses give it a very oriental appearance. It has a large market-place, and a very fair supply of water from wells and springs, and is in happier times a very prosperous and comfortable place. But now war had evidently laid hands upon it; men were few, many of the women and children wore deep mourning, and the market-place was empty.

The very day after our arrival, soon after 12.30 P.M., an order came to saddle up with all haste. We were bivouacked just outside the town; the men, except those on duty, were scattered anywhere, the horses were all out grazing, but within

half-an-hour horses and men had been collected, the men were armed and the horses saddled, and at 1 P.M. a force of about 500 men, Yeomanry and Kimberley Light Horse with a few guns, were riding quickly across the plain in a wide semicircle and extended order. None of us knew the cause of our hasty start, but I felt convinced when I saw the guns that something out of the common was in the wind. To my disgust I had been put in command of the water-barrel drawn by six mules, with no other instructions than to keep up as well as I could without galloping. So we hastened on for about twelve miles, and about 2.30 a couple of rifle-shots told me that our advanced guard had come in touch with some enemy. I hurried on my boys as fast as possible, but unfortunately arrived too late to join the men of my own company; so I left my cart with the ammunition reserve, and went on to join a party who were keeping up a continuous fire from two small kopjes on the enemy's position which was plainly visible 600 or 700 yards away. Behind one of the small kopjes our guns were posted, but their time was not yet. The position held by the enemy was a sort of natural fortress, crowned with great boulders, behind which a man could stand secure from rifle fire. Behind it uneven ground stretched away towards some hilly country, in which pursuit would have been difficult. Our men had been sent round on both flanks, so as to draw a complete cordon round the position. I could see in the distance the led horses, and knew that the dismounted men were advancing to the attack. The rattle of rifle

fire grew heavier, and the Maxim of the Kimberleys also came into action; but still the afternoon was wearing away, and if the enemy could hold out till dark it would be difficult to prevent their slipping away. We on our side were ordered to cease fire for fear of injuring our own men, and at last the guns came into action. After the first shell a single Boer rushed out, apparently to get to their horses; a volley laid him low. At last, just as the sun was setting, the white flag went up. Giving instructions to my water-cart to follow I galloped over to see how my own company had been faring on the other side. I found them just collecting after helping to secure the prisoners. A few were excited, but most seemed calm and even gloomy. They described how they had unexpectedly almost stumbled upon the Boer position, before the main flanking movement had been executed, and had fallen under a very hot fire. Out of about twenty present, one officer was killed and four men wounded, three of them rather severely. Then they lay for a long time under cover, until the rest of the advancing line came up; at last the order to fix bayonets was given, and just as they were going in the white flag went up. In other parts of the field an officer and two men were killed and several men wounded. Considering the immense strength of the position attacked it was surprising that so few of the attacking force were hit. The Boer force numbered about 100, but I think another party escaped before the action began. Their losses were about eight killed and some wounded; and we took about seventy

4TH BATTERY R.F.A. IN ACTION.

THE COMPANY'S BAGGAGE ON THE MARCH.

prisoners. Amongst the killed was Villebois-Mareuil, the French colonel who was in command of the party.

When the prisoners had been secured dusk was just falling, and worse than that, great clouds had gathered, and a few drops of rain betokened the approach of a tremendous thunder-storm. Our different companies seemed to disappear in a moment. I found the prisoners and their escort, and started with them on the march back. The rain was now falling in torrents, the thunder was rolling almost continuously overhead, and the only light was that given by the incessant flashes of lightning. After going some way we came to a farm, and there it was decided to lock up the prisoners and keep guard over them till morning. I got permission to leave my cart behind, and rode on alone. Impressive as the afternoon had been, with its first experience of the angry whine of bullets, and the ghastly sight of the dead and wounded, it was far surpassed by that night. The solitary grandeur of the veldt, which seemed to spread vaster and more limitless than ever in the darkness; the crashing thunder, that so contemptuously surpassed the petty noises of our puny fight, the vivid lightning and the drenching rain, were awe-inspiring in the extreme. As my tired horse stumbled along the hardly distinguishable track, I felt that it was good to be alone.

At last the rain cleared off a little, and the lights of Boshof camp began to twinkle hopefully. But it was yet a long and weary march before they began to get any closer; at times indeed

they appeared to get farther off than ever, till I seemed to be pursuing a mere will-o'-the-wisp. And our bivouac, when I did reach it, was not a very inviting spot, with our cook's fire extinguished by the rain, and nothing but a soaked blanket and wet ground to call a home. Still, home it was, and I was glad to lie down, just as I was, to sleep very soundly, regardless of everything.

Next day the prisoners came in; a strange crew they were, chiefly Frenchmen, with a few Boers and Hollanders and a Russian or two. The foreigners were for the most part thoroughly glad to be released from the dangers and fatigues of campaigning. One vivacious little fellow, a Corsican named Antonio, wounded in the arm, asked me if I thought he could be employed in the English hospitals as an orderly. I told him he was much more likely to spend some time upon an island not unfamiliar to his greatest compatriot, a notion which he enjoyed exceedingly then. I have often wondered since whether Antonio still finds it a real sweetener of the pains of captivity.

The same evening we buried friend and foe alike, with military honours, in the melancholy little graveyard, under the shadow of the cypresses, and the bugles of the 9th Brigade sounded the "Last Post" over those friends and comrades, who sleep there unforgotten.

On the body of the French commander Villebois was found a document with a complete plan for the storming of Boshof camp on the evening

of April 6. This was to be an incident of his march to blow up the railway bridge over the Modder, but he had left out of his calculations the possible arrival of a mounted force like ours. Alas for the vanity of human wishes! April 6 was the very day that we buried him in Boshof graveyard, and the camp remained unstormed.

CHAPTER VI

IN CAMP AT BOSHOF

DURING the rest of April and the first ten days of May our headquarters remained at Boshof, for a long time the most northerly post occupied by British troops in the Orange Free State. At one time the main portion of the force moved northward to Swartzkopje, and we thought the great advance had begun, but apparently changed orders came from Bloemfontein and the column returned to Boshof, chased by a large and aggressive force of the enemy, who doubtless thought our retirement due to their efforts.

Although our camp was a stationary one there was plenty to do. The task of supplying the column both for its present needs and for its future requirements, when the forward march should begin, demanded a constant stream of convoys to and from Kimberley; sometimes a huge traction-engine came puffing in, more often it was the usual team of ox-waggons. We were always glad to go as escort to a convoy. Life in a stationary camp tends to become monotonous, men are inclined to become slack and lazy, and numbers fall ill for no particular reason, except that there is more to eat and less active exercise. Once on the march every one is braced up again, and there is always

a chance of some adventure. Marching with an ox convoy means early starts and late bivouacs, for the ox will only trek his best in the cool of the morning and evening, and likes to spend his midday grazing.

Besides the convoys there were patrolling expeditions to search farms for arms, to repair a telegraph wire or some similar purpose. Further, there was the regular outpost duty. The night-picket duty was usually done by the infantry, who occupied posts not more than a mile or two from the camp, and also formed a chain of sentries. By day four or five advanced posts six or seven miles from camp were held by the mounted men. We used to creep out in the early morning, an hour or two before dawn, and ride, teeth chattering with the cold, slipping and sliding over the stones, wondering why it never occurred to the Boers to seize one of these posts in the night and give the picket a bad surprise in the morning. After the return from Swartzkopje, the enemy became much more enterprising, and there were a few skirmishes; often we had to saddle up in haste and gallop out to the support of a threatened post. But usually it was peaceful in the extreme. Looking out over the wide landscape basking in the sun, the horizon quivering with strange mirages, the air filled with the drone of beetles and other insects, and, that most peaceful of all sounds, the coo-cooing of the turtle-doves, with numbers of lizards sunning themselves on the rocks and a covey of partridges unsuspectingly dusting themselves not far off, it was almost impossible to believe that we were in the

face of grim war, and that to sleep on our post was a grave military offence. Near one of the posts there was, however, a melancholy reminder of realities. Standing all alone was a farm, prettily called the Fountain of the Olive-trees; it had the usual garden and fruit trees; some tall poplars grew beside the dam, and not far off the olives, after which the farm was named. A few chickens scurried hastily about the garden, but other sign of life there was none; the door was off its hinges, the windows were smashed, and so strong an air of desolation brooded over the place that when I tied my horse up to one of the wooden pillars of the stoep he shivered and neighed loudly and tried to break away. When I went in, I found the whole place looking as though some demon of destruction had entered in and taken his fill of pleasure. Things in the house were not looted, they were simply smashed senselessly to atoms. Not a chair, table, or picture was left whole, even the mattresses had been ripped and torn into a thousand pieces. Most sad of all was the room which had evidently been the children's room. Their books and playthings were strewn in fragments about the floor, mingled with pieces of letters written in large round handwriting. I was glad to escape from so melancholy a spectacle, which brought home to me so vividly the horrors of war; the state of the house suggested terrible ideas as to the fate of the inmates, but I believe the whole thing was really the work of Kaffirs belonging to the place, who, finding the place deserted, had thus wreaked their senseless spite.

We used to enjoy our days on outpost very much. Unless we were doing our turn of watching or patrolling, there was plenty of leisure to write a letter, to sleep, or to cook, without danger of interruption from some orderly-sergeant who wanted a fatigue party. Sometimes the post would be near a kraal or a farm where chickens and eggs could be got, occasionally even butter or a bag of those dried peaches that no Boer farmer likes to be without; when soaked for some time and then stewed they make excellent eating.

It used to astonish the regular soldiers very much that we used to go out on these posts in small independent parties without any non-commissioned officer. Once, near Lindley, we had reached our camping-ground very early in the day, and I and two other troopers were sent by an officer to take up our position on a hill. When we reached the place, which he had indicated from below, we found it to be a perfectly useless position, so we moved on a mile or two to another hill, which gave us a commanding view of the country. After some time a party of signallers arrived with a heliograph in charge of a sergeant. After some conversation they asked which of us was a sergeant, as none of us had any stripes on our arm. "Neither of us," I said; "we are all troopers." The sergeant very nearly had a fit with astonishment. "Then who is in charge of you?"—"We are in charge of ourselves." They could not believe it. "Somebody *must* be in charge of you. Who posted you here?"—"We posted ourselves." They thought the world was upside down.

Occasionally, when the coast was clear, we would manage to get a shot at a buck or a hare, and once I got a great reputation by killing a partridge with my rifle. It was, of course, a dreadful fluke, but it made a very agreeable change of diet after much bully beef.

Night outpost work was a more serious matter. Occasionally we took the place of the infantry in this duty, and then we marched out on foot with our blankets and necessaries. The worst was when we were called upon unexpectedly at the end of a long day's march. A staff officer would come up, just as we were nearing camp, when great part of the column had already reached their bivouac, and their fires were beginning to twinkle pleasantly. "Your troop has got to go back and hold that hill two miles back." It is the most disappointing thing imaginable. Probably no one knows where the troop is posted, so there will be no blankets and no supper to-night. For about two or three hours everything is perfectly miserable, but then the bitterness of disappointment wears off; everybody becomes reconciled to their lot: somebody produces a few biscuits or some tobacco, and in the morning it seems to have been quite a decent night after all.

About one night in four or five we were on duty as line-guard or camp-guard. The line-guard looks after the horses, and sees that they are all properly tied up and safe and sound. Camp-guard is a most wearisome duty, usually mere sentry-go with absolutely nothing to do, except to march up and down carrying a rifle "in a smart and soldierly manner," or to stand at ease in the orthodox

position. Sometimes, but not often, you had a diversion, as, for instance, when a sentry kept his own captain inexorably out of the lines because he had forgotten the pass-word. At Boshof a road which was a good deal used ran through our regimental camp, and one day it was decided to close it. I happened to be the sentry posted there with orders not to allow anybody to pass on foot who did not belong to the regiment, and not to allow anybody at all to come in with horses. The orderly officer told me to carry out these orders strictly; so I did, and for once had an amusing afternoon, for blocking the road meant a detour of about a mile, and a good many of those I stopped were very indignant at the new orders. Particularly annoyed were some of the Kimberley Light Horse, who wanted to pass to bring in their horses from grazing. They said they would fetch their captain; I said I would be delighted. So he came, in an extremely explosive condition, and swore magnificently. I explained my orders. He swore the more. I agreed with him, but that had no effect. Finally he said he would go and complain to my officers. I said, "Yes, sir, but not by this road." Soon after I was relieved, but he was still giving me his views.

Besides ourselves there were at Boshof four battalions of regular infantry, the 9th Brigade, consisting of the Yorkshire Light Infantry, the Northamptons, the Northumberland Fusiliers, and the North Lancashires, these last commanded by Colonel Kekewich of Kimberley fame. There were also some companies of the South Wales Borderers and Scottish Rifles Militia. Among

the regulars there was a great deal of curiosity about the Yeomanry; it was freely surmised that they were to be a feather-bed corps, paid higher and fed better than the ordinary, and destined to be kept safely in snug places. Tommy Atkins was naturally at first inclined to be a little suspicious on this account, but when he found that we received the same pay, ate the same bully-beef and biscuits, and were subject to the same discipline as he was, he was extremely delighted and became perfectly friendly and communicative.

They were splendid specimens of British soldiers. Life in camp gave many opportunities of getting to know them personally: afterwards I saw them under all the trying circumstances of long marching and hard campaigning, and words would fail me to describe the admiration I have for them. I have often wished that a battalion of infantry, after many weeks of continuous marching, could be taken and set down in England just as they were coming into camp some evening at the end of a sixteen or seventeen miles' march, with all the signs of long marching, fatigue, and privations upon them, their faces haggard and worn but brown and healthy-looking, their khaki uniform faded into all sorts of shades, patched and tattered, their boots in holes, and over all the day's dust. Then and only then could people at home understand a tithe of what the infantry have done and suffered. When the soldiers do come home, they will have been fed and clothed and rested, and stepping along to the inspiriting strains

of a band, they will themselves forget, so who else should remember, the pain and grief of the miles and miles of endless veldt. I have seen men become absolutely stupid with marching; who neither knew nor cared where or how long they were going; who marched and halted, lay down and got up again, at the word of command, perfectly mechanically and without the least emotion, so benumbed were they into complete indifference by fatigue.

But in camp it was different, and all this was afterwards. Here Tommy Atkins was himself; in the coffee-shops about the town, at the washing-places, and in camp I used to see a great deal of them, and cheery, good fellows most of them were, and some of them extremely amusing. Soldiers' language, especially when the soldiers had been in India, and stopped for a time at Mauritius on their way to the Cape, as some of these had, is in itself one of the most extraordinary things imaginable. Ordinarily the vocabulary is small, and a few words, which have quite lost their original significance, but which do not even so bear writing, are used over and over again with every kind and variety of meaning. But I have noticed a great difference in regiments in the amount of use which is made of such words, and of course many private soldiers never make use of them at all. Then there are a number of words used regularly with a meaning of their own; one of the most frequent of these is "scrap," which means "fight," verb or substantive. Other words are corruptions of Indian words, as "blighty," which means "home." I am not sure

about the spelling. And on the top of these were added a few stray French phrases picked up in the Mauritius. Many an evening have I sat in some hospitable tent drinking cocoa, listening to strange yarns told in this strange tongue. There was one champion story-teller; he had been twenty years and more in the army, and never more than two or three in the same regiment; no one knew his real name, and perhaps he hardly knew himself. He had spent a great part of his time in the cells, and he was up to every trick and dodge by which an officer can be cajoled and every sort of practical joke which can be played upon a recruit, and his own experience had made him most fertile in inventing expedients for getting a man out of a scrape. He would not always talk, but when he did, it was clear the man was a born humourist and *raconteur*. I am afraid he will come to no good end, though I wish him well.

The 9th Brigade men were never tired of talking of Belmont, Graspan, Modder River, and Magersfontein; I am sure they genuinely love fighting; the joyful buzz that surges about the camp-fire after a fight is a thing to remember, after the tired silence of less eventful days.

Two things struck me as remarkable about the soldiers—their great love of personal cleanliness and neatness, and their love of gambling. Both arise, I think, largely out of the conditions under which they live. When eighteen men are living and sleeping in one tent, nothing but the most careful packing and neatness will fit everybody in, and a dirty man could not be tolerated. As for

gambling, life in barracks or in camp is so dull, and there is so much time spent in mere dawdling, that it is not surprising that any kind of excitement should be eagerly seized upon. Gambling is, of course, strictly forbidden by the King's Regulations, and corporals in charge of tents are held responsible for any going on there. But the sound of a game called "House," which is a very simple form of gambling, is very familiar in my ears. The game is not a complicated one; a series of twenty blocks, each having inscribed upon it five numbers (the numbers range from one to one hundred) is dealt out as far as it will go according to the number of players; thus if there are twenty players, each has one block; if only ten, each has two blocks, and so on. Each player stakes a small sum, usually 2d. per block, which is put in the pool. The same numbers, one to one hundred, are put separately into a bag and mixed up, and called out one by one by some one appointed for that purpose. As each number is called out, the player who has it on one of his blocks covers it up, and the first man who has his block of numbers all covered, cries "House," and takes the pool. This game is played for hours together, and it is a most curious sight to see it being played at night. The first time I saw it I could not make out what was going on. A large space of ground was covered with candle-ends all alight; round each candle was a group of eager faces, while a monotonous voice cried 24, 36, 40, 18, 94, and so on; then some one said "House," and there was a pause, then the

voice began again. I have known quite large sums change hands in an evening, but usually loss and gain are quite trifling, as might be expected.

It would of course be absurd to pretend that the ordinary soldier is contented with his lot. At any rate he does a great deal of grumbling, or, as he would call it, "grousing." He thinks his pay is very small, and he is much irritated by the deductions which are made from it; he has grievances about his boots and many other points, which may seem small, but are of great importance to him. He will tell you that his one desire is to get out of the army, and that when he returns home he will do his very best to prevent any of his friends or relatives enlisting. Certainly the continual minute routine and pipe-clay that go to make a smart regiment in peace-time must be maddening to a man of any spirit. "They treat us like children," said one man, "and then expect us to behave like men." And yet, if, after listening to a string of grievances—and the soldier is not the man to make light of them when talking to his friends—you say you suppose they would not enlist if they had to begin again, there is hardly one but will tell you that he is a better man for going into the army. How it comes about that Tommy Atkins, in spite of it all, is the fine fellow he is, is a mystery I cannot pretend to fathom.

Of the original inhabitants of Boshof we did not see a great deal; indeed there was not a great deal to see. There were very few able-bodied men about, but a good number of women

and plenty of children. Among the men were a few burghers who had surrendered and taken the oath of neutrality. One of them had a farm-house just at the corner of the town nearest our camp; he had fought in all the battles against Lord Methuen, but was now perfectly contented to let his house for brigade headquarters, and made what profit he could by selling milk and eggs when he had any. Apparently he did not take the slightest interest in anything that was going on, but I doubt if his indifference was as great as it appeared. Some of the women were very different. They did not hesitate to proclaim their sympathies, and while they did not scruple to turn the presence of the hated rooinek to good account by supplying him with a cup of coffee or a loaf of bread or a pound of butter at most exorbitant rates, they made it clear that this was merely a case of spoiling the Egyptians. One old lady was particularly bitter. "If I thought," she said, "that you would take Pretoria and finally subdue the Boers, I would take that Bible and tear it in pieces and burn it, and never again believe a word it says." That view was not unknown elsewhere; I have heard that the same doctrine was actually preached from the pulpit by ministers of the Dutch Church at Heidelberg and elsewhere. The religion of the Boers is essentially an Old Testament religion. Such bitterness was not very common, and grew distinctly less during our occupation of Boshof. It is hardly necessary to say that neither at Boshof nor anywhere else did I ever know an instance of Boer women being treated with any rudeness or

disrespect by any soldier. Speaking from my own experience, I am firmly convinced that such statements are abominable slanders, though there is no need for my testimony on the subject. What is perfectly true is that the Boer authorities tried their best to spread the belief that the arrival of the British soldiers would be followed by every sort of outrage. On several occasions I have been assured of this by Boer women, and that they were much relieved and delighted to find it was not so.

Other inhabitants of Boshof were a very miscellaneous, nondescript lot. One in particular, an Irishman who had been long in the country, was, I should think, as untrustworthy a rascal as one could wish to meet, though amusing. He followed the trade of a blacksmith when he felt disposed, but at times he had scruples about putting his talents at the services of the invaders of his adopted country; the scruples were intermittent, and usually were found to coincide with a difficulty on some question of payment. He lived in a square two-roomed hovel, almost worthy of Donegal, and had married a slatternly Boer woman. Two or three fair-haired, blue-eyed children, who might have been pretty if they had been clean, sprawled about the floor along with some poultry; only the pig was absent. Yet he was a capitalist in his way, for he offered me ten shillings for the badge on my helmet, and the same price for as many more as I could get; in fact he appeared to be a kind of dealer in war curios of all kinds. But his great talent was cooking; his *chef-d'œuvre* was

a sort of plum-pudding made out of I know not what materials, good filling stuff of an excellent flavour, though bad for carrying on the march. He also made pancakes and buns, and very fair coffee to wash them down. His house was much frequented of an evening, for he was a gifted talker as well as a cook.

We had a good many Kaffirs attached to the column, as drivers and ox or mule boys, and a good many more were generally hanging about. A lazy lot they were, but as cheerful as natives of such a sunny country ought to be; if left to themselves they will sit and chatter endlessly, and laugh all day. Any little joke, however small, will amuse them intensely, but they have great reactions, and when they are hungry and cold they get unutterably miserable. In fact, they are mere children. Sometimes they had a dance in the evening, a most unattractive spectacle one would have thought, but they were never tired of watching. Two men stand up opposite each other, and steadily pound the ground alternately with each foot, their arms hanging straight down in front of them, nodding their heads, and uttering all the time the most dismal grunts and groans. This weird performance they keep up for a very long time; every now and then one of the spectators joins in most enthusiastically for a short time only. Many of the Kaffirs are very fond of music, and I have often heard them singing part-songs together with a very pretty effect. Indeed, it gives you quite an unpleasant shock if after listening to these melodious sounds you catch a sight of the strange, uncouth figures

from whom they proceed. It is just the same with the Kaffir women. If you see them from behind, they very often look magnificent; they have splendid figures, and walk with head erect and the gait of a queen. They turn round, and you are looking at the most appallingly hideous and grotesque faces imaginable.

CHAPTER VII

ON THE MARCH

At last, in the first week of May, there began to be signs that the great advance was imminent. More yeomanry came in, and the supply waggons were loaded. The air was thick with rumours; still we lingered on, getting more and more impatient, till at last our marching orders came.

Before daybreak on a cloudless morning we marched out across the plain, heading north-east. My regiment was in the advance guard, and as we came to a rising ground, I turned and looked back to see the whole column on the move, just after sunrise. The whole plain seemed covered with horsemen; there were four battalions of yeomanry, then practically at full strength, all riding in wide open order, in the centre the guns, the closer formation of the infantry, and the long train of baggage waggons still winding out of camp.

Looking at that fine column, it was impossible not to feel a thrill of exultation. We knew that we were part of the general scheme of advance, and that right across the country from Bechuanaland to Natal other armies were advancing in like manner. It was a striking manifestation of the power of the British Empire, so long-suffering and in the end so certain. For twenty years we had

suffered defeat and humiliation from those whom we had held in the hollow of our hand; we had let them pass from insolence to insolence, gradually building up their power in a manner which could have but one object; we had allowed them to take us unprepared, and declare war upon us at their own time, so that dark days came upon us. Our colonies were invaded and harried, even annexed by the invaders, our cities and armies besieged. But now at last the tide was fairly turned, and these great columns sweeping up the country were visible proof that the day of visitation was come at last, and that Great Britain was no longer to be insulted and defied with impunity.

To my mind the great forward movement in May was the culminating point of the war; as it were the climax of the Transvaal drama. However difficult and tedious the long after-part may be, it is only the filling in of the details.

But a trooper on the march has little time for such reflections. Usually our duties were to act as advance-guard, rear-guard, or flanking patrol, that is, to form part of the fringe of horsemen thrown out from the column two or three miles on every side. Too much importance cannot be attached to this.

A child can see that if such a fringe is properly maintained, the column cannot be surprised or ambushed. The men employed in this duty must keep their eyes and ears open, both for their own sake and that of the column. Every place that looks at all suspicious, or able to conceal an enemy, has to be searched. Very often there is no other

means of doing this than by what is called drawing fire. Suppose you are approaching a chain of low hills stretching right across the route, which do not admit of being ridden round but which might conceal an army. Four or five men are ordered out to reconnoitre. Away you gallop in wide open order, the rest of the troop is halted to watch you; you make for the crest at different points, not going in a straight line but slantwise, so as to present a less easy mark. There is no other way of telling if the enemy is there, unless they fire at you. So you gallop on and wonder. Perhaps some little way from the ridge you draw rein, make a feint of seeing something, and turn quickly to gallop back. Ten to one if an enemy is there he will think you have seen him; if you do not hear the crack of a rifle in the first few yards, you may ride on again pretty confident that the crest is clear. Once on the top, a good look round will show you that there are no men, and what is better proof of safety, no horses to be seen. Then you wait for your comrades and the advance goes on. Personally I never was shot at while doing this duty on the march, but it is perhaps more exciting to stay behind and watch other people doing it. Nearer and nearer they get; then suddenly you hear the double barking of the Mausers; the four are galloping for their lives, and through your glasses you can see the dust kicked up all about them by the bullets. Will they all escape? No; one man is down, the other three are safe.

It is one of the great advantages of the veldt-bred ponies that their rider can leave it absolutely

to them to pick their way, and concentrate his whole attention on watching the horizon or any suspicious spot. An English horse fresh from road and meadow will often put his nose in the air and march straight into an ant-bear hole or stumble over an ant-hill without the smallest compunction, and it takes a good deal of experience to find out that these falls do very little harm. Until that lesson is learnt, the rider is very apt, especially when the light is failing and the going bad, to be diverted from his watchfulness to guiding his horse, so that his value as a scout is seriously impaired. But a colonial-bred pony will step along, avoiding even a shadow cast on the ground, and his rider may feel perfectly secure. During all the time I rode a colonial pony, I never had but one fall, and that was when I was galloping in the dark. A marvellous little beast he was, standing scarcely thirteen hands, looking so feeble and spindle-legged you would have thought he could not have carried a girl. Yet for six weeks' hard going he carried me and all my kit, whose combined weight must have been well over twenty stone, and was never better than at the end of the time, when he disappeared one dark night, and I doubt not carried some one else, I hope a lesser man, for many weeks more.

Of course he could not gallop very far, but at his own lolloping pace he would travel untiringly all day. Every time we halted even for a moment down would go his head, and he would graze, as though he thought he might not get another bite till the next day, but he never had much use for

oats. Under shell fire he was as steady as a rock, but rifle fire he absolutely detested, and however tired he might be, I could always rely upon him to gallop his best under any emergency.

I never wish to have a better war-horse than little "Tommy"; his loss was a real calamity. I mourned him bitterly, all the more as I had to march the next day on foot, having disposed my saddlery as well as I could upon a horse with a back too sore to ride. His successor, who "turned up in the night," made me lament the change still more. He was a great sluggish Argentine with a Roman-nosed head as big as the rest of his body He was a most conspicuous colour, covered all over with a sort of bright yellow fur like a huge cat, except for a dark stripe that ran down his back. He had no heart in him, and had the roughest of paces, when he would go at all. Ordinarily he would not keep up with the rest of the troop, except after sunset, when he thought he must be approaching camp. Curiously enough he would also do very well before sunrise, for he had not intelligence enough to make a distinction. When you put his nose-bag on, he would be sure to try and hit you in the face with it; sluggish as he was, he always objected to being caught when he had been out grazing, and often led me a weary chase, and, like other Argentines, he was very awkward to lead. Altogether a most objectionable animal. I always hoped that his conspicuous colour would lead his original owner to reclaim him, especially as he had on a very good head-collar and chain when I first got him; but he never did, and I can well under-

stand the reason. His one virtue was that he was enormously strong, and ate well.

As for English horses, those of any real use in our experience were exceptions. In time they learn to avoid the pitfalls of the veldt, if they survive, but in the meantime too many break down under the continued fatigue and the scanty food. They will not learn to pick a mouthful whenever they can, and when they do condescend to imitate their colonial cousins, they very often fail to make the best use of their opportunity, by looking about or thinking of something else. I had two English horses, one which I brought out on the transport, a shaggy-legged cob, clumsy and rough, which, however, lasted longer than many a better-looking horse; the other a good-looking Yorkshire hunter with a free moving action, which gave me many a fall, and succumbed after ten days on the march.

Next after his duty to the column and to his horse comes the trooper's duty to himself, a duty which occupies a very large portion of his time and his thought. On the veldt two of the prime necessities of life bulk very large; a man must get food and, so far as he can, shelter from the weather when he goes to sleep. Army rations are naturally at times but scanty fare for a well-grown man in full exercise, and if large bodies of men are moving through a country where food is abundant, no regulations in the world will prevent a good number of pigs, poultry, and sheep finding their way to the pot in an unauthorised manner. Yet in the majority of cases we paid for what we took, and the Boer

women were generally anxious to bargain; very often their gains by what we paid must have quite outweighed their losses through unexplained disappearances of poultry and so on. One great difficulty was the impossibility of procuring any small change. A man with a sovereign but no silver, who wished to buy a chicken for sixpence, was equally badly off with a man who had no money at all, so far as paying went. On one occasion we received a sovereign of our pay on account, and it was absolutely useless for any present purpose; offers to take fifteen shillings worth of silver in return for a pound of gold were constantly refused, because silver change was too valuable to part with at almost any price.

In spite of this, remarkably little looting went on. The Kaffirs, nearly all of whom have numbers of poultry living with them in their kraal, had never any reason to complain; but naturally when we came to some deserted farm with good geese and turkeys staring us in the face, looking all ready to be plucked, what could a hungry man do? So at times there was plenty, and much rejoicing in our bivouac. Discussion at such times would run high as to whether a chicken was better fried or boiled, whether a goose should be eaten cold or hot. One night near Bothaville there were forty chickens stewing in the company's pots, besides the private enterprise of individuals who had managed to secure some fuel of their own. It is true that our orders were very strict against taking anything, and there was one peculiarly alarming one, which declared that the man detected in such an offence would be

shot, and the battalion sent back for garrison duty. But we had lawyers in our ranks who were able to point out that the public health and safety was the prime consideration, and that such laws must be intended to be interpreted in consonance with it. Perhaps the number of butchers, whom we also had the good fortune to possess, was a more important argument. They were able to despatch and divide the carcass of any animal with the most remarkable dexterity, so that it was very soon most difficult to find any public evidence of its existence.

On one occasion we had managed to swoop down upon a farm and capture several armed prisoners, including the owner. In the afternoon a few of us were sent out to scour the country and bring in all the stock we could find. We found a number of horses, cattle, and about 500 sheep, and drove them back to camp. Between us and the camp was some very rugged ground and a donga. Crossing this it was difficult to keep the stock together, and a number of sheep got scattered, and emerging from the donga found themselves right among the bivouacs of an infantry regiment that were reposing their lean bodies after long marching on empty stomachs. Now infantry, because they can only move slowly, and seldom get away from their officers, hardly ever get much chance of supplementing their rations. On this occasion, when they saw mutton actually falling into their mouths, they rose to their opportunities like men. The way these sheep disappeared was extraordinary; they melted like wax before the assaults of Tommy Atkins; they were skinned and cut up

before they could realise where they had got to. When we eventually collected the stragglers and penned them in the compounds near the farm, we were careful to do no more than answer the questions we were asked by the commissariat officer to whom we had to report ourselves. "Yes, sir, about 400 sheep safely penned up, besides cattle and horses."

Sugar was one of the great difficulties; the army sugar-ration was supposed to be used up entirely in the tea and coffee; and on the veldt one has an almost unappeasable craving for sweets. The ration of jam which came once in two or three days was always most acceptable. Under such circumstances the division of a pot of jam among eight hungry men becomes a very delicate and difficult operation, and I have seen many a serious dispute arise about it. I always felt it an immense compliment when I was asked to divide the jam for my troop, and I did so always upon the condition that no one should question my distribution afterwards. Sometimes we managed to get from a store a pot of treacle or golden syrup; it has the great advantage of lasting longer and going further than any jam, and is most sustaining. But in spite of all this sugar remains the great need for all sorts of cooking. We were often reduced to filling our gaping voids with a sort of porridge made of Kaffir meal, which could generally be obtained from some kraal, but without sugar it is very difficult to eat, and indeed even with sugar I should be sorry to eat it except under necessity; but there are times when to put something warm and sustaining inside you is worth any Carlton or Savoy dinner. With sugar, too, you

may cook an army biscuit in various ways so as to become a delicacy. But sugar was difficult to get and difficult to carry when got, and we learned to be most grateful for the invention of saccharine, which seemed to be made on purpose for troopers marching baggageless on the veldt. It may not be so sustaining as real sugar, but at any rate you can carry in a waistcoat pocket enough concentrated sweetness to eke out your cooking for many weeks. I was fortunate enough to discover some in a chemist's shop at Kroonstad, and readily bought up the small stock he had.

One night we had a cruel disappointment on the subject of sugar. We had bivouacked on the Rhenoster River after a weary day's marching and some fighting. It was very cold and dark when we got into camp, and our waggons were yet far off. I was horse guard, but my messmates had gone off on the rumour of a store to see what could be got. At last I descried the returning form of my most stalwart messmate staggering under an enormous sack, his face positively beaming with pleasure. "I have got," he said impressively, "enough sugar to last the whole company for a fortnight, and practically for nothing." Such good fortune seemed almost incredible, but the triumph in his face and the sack upon his back raised my hopes high. Alas! when the sack was opened it contained no more than an immense lump of rock-salt. I was able to laugh, for I had not carried it a mile or more, but he was a sadder man for days.

The army biscuit is a truly wonderful invention. Though at first, especially in hot weather, it seemed

but dry fare, we became extremely fond of it in the end, though some varieties are much better than others. As for bully beef, there came a time when we looked upon it as a positive luxury, only surpassed by bully mutton, which is really good. In the early morning when it is solid from the cold, and you can cut it in slices, it looks quite appetising; but when the sun is up, and it has got sticky and dusty in a mess tin, it takes a hungry man to eat it. It is very hard on the foot-soldier that his tinned meat is often given out in 14 lb. tins; no soldier, who already carries 49 lbs. of kit upon his back, is going to add a 14 lb. load to his burden, and the consequence is that either each man eats his day's ration at once, and goes hungry for the next twenty-four hours, for bully beef is ill to carry loose in hot weather, or if the men are not hungry just then, the whole tin is left behind, as I have often seen, for lack of anything to carry it: 1 lb. tins are very much more convenient.

In those days many of us learnt for the first time the value of dripping as a substitute for butter, and how to make it; and indeed I could fill many pages with accounts of our food and cooking arrangements, on which we spent much time and thought. Fuel was hardly less important. There is but little wood on the rolling uplands of the Orange Colony, but there are many barbed wire fences, whose posts seem to have been put up on purpose to make the fires of an invading army. Unfortunately in many places the posts are made of stone, a most reprehensible practice, and then we had to fall back upon cow-dung and grass.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ADVANCE

Two days of uneventful marching followed the start from Boshof, the enemy all the time retiring before us; we found their camp fires still smouldering, but no more. The third day found us preparing to start at 1 A.M., and soon after daybreak, which at that time of year is about 6.30, we managed to come in touch with the enemy's rearguard, and after an exciting gallop we captured four prisoners, which put us all in very good spirits. In the afternoon we camped, only to receive orders to start again in an hour or two. We fell in again in pitch darkness, for the moon had not yet risen, and moved off. It is not the custom to tell the men where they are going or how far on these occasions; wrongly I think, for I believe that all men work the better if they have some notion what they are at. We did not know that we were in for an all-night march, but we began to suspect it, as hour after hour passed, and we moved constantly on, more and more silently and more and more sleepily, now riding, now leading our horses to ease them. Such an inexpressibly dreary thing is an all-night trek. An everlasting rolling prairie, stretching apparently always uphill, monotonous in the extreme, all of drab colour in the dim moonlight; occasionally a line of kopjes loom-

A HALT TO FEED HORSES.

AN INTERVAL OFF DUTY.

ing up across our path gave promise of a possible ambush, and kept our interest awake for a moment, then the same steady dulness as before. About midnight we halted for a time and off-saddled. I was on guard, but every one else was asleep almost at once, though not for long; once more on the march, the slight rest seemed only to have made us more sleepy; most men were rolling in their saddles, and one actually fell off and lay as he fell asleep upon the ground. It began to be whispered that we were going to surprise the little town of Hoopstad, and it was a welcome sight when at last, in the dawn, we saw the tower of the church standing out against the sky. Just before the sun rose we halted, and then the order was given to take the town at the gallop. The effect was electrical; every sleepy man woke up and grasped his rifle, and we clattered over the stony ground in great hopes of surprising the enemy; here and there a tired horse went down, but we galloped on, only to find the town evacuated, though it would have been a very easy place to hold. It was a disappointing finish to a long run, but we were glad to camp, and wait for the arrival of the main part of the column.

At Hoopstad a good many of the commando we had been pursuing came in and surrendered with their rifles and ammunition, or at least part of it, and we had some very large and lively bonfires. Leaving Hoopstad the next day we marched along the south side of the Vaal till we approached Commando Drift. Here my regiment was sent across the river by a rather difficult crossing, which it would have been impossible to make if we had been

opposed. We had to get down a winding path in single file, then creep along between the bank and a large mudbank, then cross, and up a very steep and slippery bank on the far side. My poor horse was then getting very tired, and a fearful time I had with her, for she first of all collapsed in the mud on the near side and rolled me in it, and finally tumbled down the bank on the opposite side right on the top of me. But I took no hurt beyond a stiff knee for a couple of days. Once safely over we rode pretty hard for some miles, and seized Commando Drift from the Transvaal side. Though we had not done very much, we were exceedingly pleased with ourselves. So far as we knew, and I believe we were right, we were the first regiment to cross the Vaal, and we made no doubt that we were destined to march through to Pretoria *via* Klerksdorp and Potchefstroom. We had visions of a great Waterloo near Pretoria, when we should assist in the great battle that should finally subdue the whole Boer army at one blow. As for defeat, it is unnecessary to say that none of the troops with whom I marched ever contemplated the possibility of it for one moment. We might be tired and weary with long and fruitless chasing, but we were always absolutely confident that once it came to fighting we were perfectly certain to win, and our only complaint against our General was that he seemed to us too cautious and too unwilling to risk life.

Our visions were not less substantial than those of many others who speculated on the course of the war, but we were not allowed to nurse them very long. To our great grief and disappointment, after

a few hours we had orders to recross the Vaal. It had really been part of the original plan that we should cross the river and take part in the Transvaal operations, but the disturbed state of the country made it necessary for us to cross over to the Kroonstad district east of the railway; this, however, we did not know at the time.

From a trooper's point of view our first raid into the Transvaal was not entirely fruitless. The custom-house by the Drift was abandoned, and most things that could be carried had been taken away; but we found some good fodder for our horses, and there were also a number of pigs and poultry, presumably Government property, and fairly ours by right of conquest. The pigs were young and lusty, however, and the fowls nearly as difficult to catch as the Boers, their late owners; but for all that a hungry regiment is not to be denied, and the most of them crossed over into the Free State on horseback.

From Commando Drift we continued to march along the south side of the Vaal—a pleasant route enough. The valley of the river is very pretty in places, and the banks are well wooded, which has the additional advantage of supplying excellent firewood. Very delightful it was, too, to get a real good bathe in running water. Now and again we caught sight of small parties of Boers across the river, but they had the grace never to interfere with our bathing arrangements.

During several days I had the good fortune to be employed in one of the small patrols sent out to scour the country, collect arms from the farms,

secure supplies of forage, and generally pick up information. It was very interesting work, for we visited a number of farms and saw a good deal more of the Boers at home than we should otherwise have had any chance of doing. In this part of the country there were at that time a good many men residing on their farms. No doubt the commando to which they belonged had scattered on our approach, hidden rifles and ammunition, and resumed their rôle of innocent farmer. Every house was flying the white flag on both sides of the Vaal. Some of the farms had really good buildings, and were quite clean and comfortable; one had even a resident English governess; others, of course, were nothing more than a mere mud-hovel — one room, divided possibly by a curtain. At one farm, where we stopped for a meal, the women were more than usually friendly and communicative, speaking excellent English. They had felt the greatest alarm, they told us, at the approach of English soldiers. They had been told on the best authority that every outrage would be committed, no woman would be safe, their property would be plundered and their houses burned, and so on. This they had heard from the officials of the district, and of course had believed it. "And now you are going away and no damage has been done; you have even paid for your dinner; we can hardly believe it."

That was far from being the only time we heard similar stories. Some of these people were full of indignation against the Transvaalers and also Steyn, who had brought them, they said, into evil

plight. One man, as he watched our column go by, said, "You are stronger than I thought; here are more men already than I thought the whole British army contained." Amongst others we came across the man Scouttar, who had commanded the Boers against us in the Prieska district. He had now surrendered, and was living on his farm with a pass. He was full of indignation against the faithlessness of the colonial rebels. "Seven hundred men they promised us at Prieska, and no more than seventy ever joined us." Others were full of anxiety to know whether the British Government would make the same payments to distressed farmers as had been made by the Free State Government. At that time they evidently considered the war over so far as the Free State was concerned.

Bothaville is, or rather was—for it is reported to have been since burned for its concealed stores of ammunition—a hungry-looking little place on the Valsch River not far from its junction with the Vaal. Here we had the usual bonfires of surrendered ammunition, and it is particularly memorable to us, because we kept the Queen's birthday for the last time, paraded in the town square at full strength to cheer her Majesty.

Leaving Bothaville, it became clear that we were marching to Kroonstad, and welcome rumours at the same time began to fly about that Mafeking had been relieved, which roused our enthusiasm to a great pitch. At this time our private stores, with which we had filled our holsters, were beginning to be exhausted, and we were looking forward eagerly to our arrival at Kroonstad. About half-way

between Bothaville and Kroonstad we came across a good deal of tobacco—"pure sun-dried" it was, hanging in bunches on the fences just as it had been cut, and we fell upon it gladly, though in its pure uncured state it was strong enough to make a sailor reel. It did very well, however, to eke out the scanty remains of our own tobacco, of which every scrap was more than precious.

At last early one morning we saw from the hills Kroonstad lying picturesquely below us, and marched in to take up our bivouac just a fortnight after the main column had left it on their northward march.

CHAPTER IX

KROONSTAD

KROONSTAD from the western hills, lying by the river with a good number of trees scattered here and there, bathed in full sunlight, and with some white hospital tents in front, looked picturesque enough. A nearer acquaintance soon dispelled any pleasing illusions. It had been for some time the Boer headquarters; after that our own army had halted there, but not long enough to set the place to rights.

A more foul and ill-smelling place than those outskirts of Kroonstad I never wish to see. The ground is a good deal cut up with dongas, and at every turn one came across a dead mule, horse, or ox; in the hot noonday sun all these sent forth a very pungent odour; everywhere was the usual débris of a large army. The town, too, seemed full of enteric; the big hotel opposite the station was turned into a hospital, and the Dutch church was pressed into the same service; it looked full enough inside, and outside sick men were propped against the wall all round.

The town itself in ordinary times is not at all a bad one; it has two squares and one or two spacious streets, besides some fair buildings. It has, of course, that unfinished look common

to most of the more recent towns in South Africa.

The most curious part of it is the Kaffir location, which presents the most irregular nightmare patchwork imaginable. It is the very essence of shabbiness and untidiness. There are streets, but they are not straight, nor do they lead anywhere. The houses, such as they are, stand at any kind of angle to the road; there is an absolute lack of any plan or forethought. The houses themselves are like the houses built by children with their toys. Sometimes the walls are of mud, sometimes partly of mud with a few pieces of wood thrown in, then the builder changed his mind again and put in the side of a biscuit-tin, next an old advertising-board, an old sack, and so on. The more magnificent boast a corrugated iron roof, the less a ragged thatch or canvas. The Kaffir has forgotten, it seems, his neat beehive hut and the trim flanking mud wall, and taken up vague, unrealised aspirations after a European model. The men lounge about the streets, eternally doing nothing, the more dandy dressed in a far-away imitation of civilised finery; the women do their household tasks; and small children, looking as preternaturally grave as their parents are cheerful, wander naked as when they were born, carrying those swollen bellies characteristic of all Kaffir children, due, I suppose, to the Kaffir meal which is their one food.

We got a few eggs from the Kaffirs, but otherwise the town was as bare as Mother Hubbard's cupboard. Boer and British armies in quick succession had left nothing to buy for love or money.

Only at last an enterprising Jew managed to arrive with a cargo of cocoa and groceries, and a roaring trade he did. Where he came from and how he got there was an unfathomable mystery. One little inn was still open, but I have never seen people less anxious to supply the wants of their customers; they seemed absolutely proof against the desire of gain—not only the proprietor, but every one down to the negro waiter. "Can I have something to eat?"—everybody was all smiles and politeness and promises. After a quarter of an hour there was no result whatever. Again more promises, and on our part offers of increased tips. Again nothing, and then an inspection of the kitchen revealed an absolute absence of any preparation; and no threats or promises would move them. Had we been Boers we should have known how to deal with these exasperating people and done it; we knew how, but could not do it.

A month or two later Kroonstad had a good deal improved, and its environs had been cleaned up. There were even some stores open in the town, and a certain amount of produce was being brought in from neighbouring farms. We could even get our photographs taken; a bank was opened; and we could also have our hair cut in a barber's shop in a fashion other than the barbarous custom of the camp. The barber, by the way, was a man calculated to take away one's pride in the profession of a soldier. I do not know of what nationality he was, but it was neither British nor Dutch, though I think he was a burgher. Whatever he was, his bodily presence

was contemptible; he was scarcely more than five feet high and looked weak and puny in the extreme, but he was full of martial ardour, and loved war for its own sake, or so he said. "For I have been on commando myself, and was one of the besiegers of Ladysmith. A fine time I had, plenty to eat and plenty to drink, no work, and now and then, if I liked, a little shooting at the English without any danger. Yes, I am very fond of war, and now I have surrendered, I would like to fight for the English. Not, perhaps," he added thoughtfully, "against the Boers, but do you think the English would employ me in China?" I could not encourage him, but perhaps, after all, there may be many worse soldiers than that valiant little barber.

At any rate he would doubtless have been a better soldier than one whom I chanced to meet later at Durban. I was on my way home, and was breakfasting at a hotel, where all the waiters are Indian coolies clad in spotless white linen. My coolie was most particularly attentive, and at last he explained, looking at my uniform, "I too was a soldier." Indeed," I said, "and in what regiment?" He drew himself up proudly. "A regiment of Madrassee infantry." "I suppose you have served your time?" "No," he answered with the utmost self-complacency; "we were disbanded for incompetency and insubordination."

We moved our camp from amid the smells to a breezy hill about two miles to the north of the town, which was salubrious, but cold beyond description. A north-west wind pierced our very marrows, and when the sun went down the

temperature fell at once to several degrees below freezing-point. Though we put on everything of our scanty kit it was impossible to keep warm, as we tried to snuggle down behind the shelter of our saddles, and night sentry-go during the two nights we spent on that bleak hillside was a veritable penance. A billy-can of water that I left by the side of my blankets over night was frozen solid in the morning.

But Kroonstad though cold brought us comfort, for the concentrated mails of several weeks came in, letters and parcels. When you are weary with long marching, tired of the everlasting business of seeking your daily bread and constantly talking about it, of disputations about nose-bags or selvettes and pull-throughs; when you begin to think that you are condemned for life to a perpetual routine of taking horses to water, of saddling and unsaddling, of cleaning up the lines, of inspections of sore backs or cracked heels; of filling dixies, these great cooking-pots, with water, or cleaning the mutton-fat out of them with nothing but ice-cold water and a little sand; of loading and unloading waggons, of heaving 200-lb. sacks of oats or mealies, of wood-cutting fatigues, of forage-fatigues, and a thousand others; when there seems no prospect of ever escaping from the necessity of rendering unquestioning obedience to the beck and call of innumerable persons, from generals to lance-corporals, who are set in authority over you, and of doing things which appear totally unreasonable and unnecessary; most of all perhaps when your soul revolts against the rule of some incompetent

Jack-in-office, whose only principle appears to be that he will "teach you to be a volunteer"; then what a blessed thing is a packet of letters from home! In a trice you are lifted clean away; no matter how many "great seas and shadowy mountains lie between," you are carried to a new world as it were upon a magic carpet, a world in which you are yourself again, no longer Private No. 8008, and even a sergeant-major has no terrors. Here is proof positive, enough to change any mood to cheerfulness, that there are other things in life besides horses, cooking-pots, and rifles. How you turn them over one by one, and scan the cover of the envelope so as to lose no part of the pleasure! When you have learnt all you can from the handwriting of the address, the post-mark, and the date, then you must decide on the order of opening and reading. Here are two or three, the most eagerly expected; clearly they must be the last for that very reason, lest they should spoil the interest of the others. One or two in an unknown handwriting must be the first, then those of less interest among the rest, and so on. The feast must be as long drawn out as possible, with the good wine at the end. It is difficult for people at home to realise how dull a thing campaigning really is for most part of the time, so dull that details which seem trivial in the fulness of life in England come to you on the veldt with extraordinary charm, freshness, and novelty by contrast with your own surroundings.

The mail brings more material comfort too, for it carries parcels as well as letters. If you get a

pot of tobacco or cocoa, or a bottle of saccharine, you are a man much to be envied—a millionaire, possessing, if you like, a medium of exchange more valuable than gold. A clean shirt makes you a proud man, as well as a warmer. I shall not easily forget the shirt I got that mail, of thick green flannel ; I had worn my only other for more weeks than I would care to mention. But it was not the weather to discard an old friend, so I wore the new one underneath it.

CHAPTER X

LINDLEY

At Kroonstad the talk was all of a speedy termination of the war, the air was filled with rumours of the doings of the main army; the Vaal was crossed, a great battle had been fought, Johannesburg was taken, even Pretoria, and so on; most of all this intelligent anticipation of events, for the end was not yet. After two days we marched off again to take a large convoy to Heilbron. We expected that this would be our last trek, perhaps a demonstration round the towns of the North-East Free State, similar to our progress on the west, then back to Kroonstad and so home; I suppose the Staff knew better, but certainly the regimental officers were no better informed than the rank and file. So we marched off early on the morning of Wednesday, May 29, without the least inkling of what was really happening to the east of the railway.

For the first twelve or fourteen miles everything went on as usual; we halted at midday and outspanned; it was not till we were starting for an afternoon march, that it became evident that something had happened at Headquarters. Staff officers galloped to and fro with all kinds of orders. "You are to saddle up and advance immediately." "Halt." "March." "Off saddle." "Return to camp," and

so on. To the private soldier the Staff is a most mysterious institution. They always look very neat and clean and well-fed; their usual occupation is getting first to a farm-house, or anywhere where there is probably something to be got. They may have, of course, some very important functions, but these are not obvious to the private soldier, excepting always, of course, the provost-marshal, who is always marking out the camp, or performing some other of his multifarious duties. When they are sent out by the general with orders, they never seem to get it right the first time, but still a number of orders carried by staff officers always indicate something in the wind. On this occasion, after we had been marched backwards and forwards for a little time over the same ground, we really did start off, and in a different direction to our morning march. We afterwards learned that a messenger had come in from the battalion of Yeomanry (Irish and Duke of Cambridge's Own) under Colonel Spragge. They were being hard pressed by the Boers just outside Lindley, but could hold out, it was said, till Sunday.

As this was Wednesday, we felt no great anxiety as to their safety. That night we marched with the mounted men and guns till long after dark. At dark every one was expecting to bivouac very shortly, especially as we were passing a very suitable place with plenty of water and wood. Orders were even given to send out wood-fatigue parties, and several men took up large posts from the fences on to their horses. Still no order was given to halt; on we went mile after mile, and few of those logs

ever reached our eventual camping-ground. The night got very dark, for there was no moon as yet, the track got more and more obscure. At last after what seemed an interminable time, we halted without having come to any particular camping-ground. So we bivouacked just as we were on the veldt. It was pretty evident that we had lost our way, and this was still clearer the next day, when we started off again in a different direction.

All that day (Thursday) we marched, a good way, though, as it seemed to us, nothing like so far as we might have if there had been a real emergency; but we concluded that there was still no cause for anxiety. In the afternoon we crossed some very rough ground, which would have been very difficult had the enemy been holding it, but I suppose that day the enemy was still fully occupied at Lindley. We were half expecting an all-night march, but we camped soon after it was dark; the country was certainly a difficult one for night marching. We made an early start, however, about 3 A.M., and thus began what ended by being one of the most melancholy days I spent in South Africa.

During the morning nothing particular happened; my troop acted as a sort of patrol and escort to a staff officer, visiting farms and looking out for forage. We in the ranks had not the slightest idea that we were nearing Lindley, or that any enemy was about. At one farm we were told that a Boer picket had only just left, but we thought very little of it, and were more intent upon getting a chicken or loaf of bread. About ten o'clock we heard with a great shock of surprise and indigna-

tion that the battalion of Yeomanry had surrendered the previous afternoon; we could not understand why we had not made a faster dash to save them.

About eleven o'clock a sudden Mauser fusillade and the spattering of some bullets round about awoke us to the fact that we had stumbled up against the Boer positions, and we found ourselves engaged in a battle which lasted till about three or four in the afternoon.

Our force, consisting solely of mounted men and guns, could not have numbered more than about 1500 all told; the Boers, flushed with their victory of the day before, had between 2000 and 3000 men, and were holding a very strong line of kopjes. They were, however, more concerned to get away with their convoy and prisoners than to prevent our occupation of Lindley.

We attacked on a front several miles wide, and from personal observation we could tell very little of what was going on on the left, for our position was on the extreme right. The sound of the guns, however, and the rattle of rifles told us that the heaviest fire was going on in that direction. Gradually the left-wing battle rolled farther and farther away, till at last the firing ceased about three in the afternoon. Later we heard of the gallant dash which had been made by the 3rd Regiment of Yeomanry under that best of colonels, Younghusband. They had managed to get right in to the Boer convoy and cut off a good portion of it, including a couple of guns. Unfortunately they were too weak to hold what they had got, and were obliged to retire, losing heavily in so

doing. We were exceedingly vexed when we heard of it, for the Boers opposite us had retired long before the firing ceased, and it seemed to us that we might easily have been brought across to reinforce their charge. However, a private soldier has no right and no knowledge on which to criticise his general's tactics, and probably we had to guard our flank against a possible movement on the right.

Meantime we had some anxious moments of our own. After the first outburst of firing, my company was ordered to advance across an open piece of plain with a big kopje on our left, 600 or 700 yards distant. We were right out in the open, advancing at a walk, when a few bullets began to spit, and in a very few minutes we found ourselves enveloped in a hot fire, to which it was impossible to reply, for there was no cover for the men, and no shelter for the horses. Accordingly we had to gallop on some way to get behind a friendly ridge, from which we could reply in safety. It was a most enjoyable gallop. My pony had been very tired by our morning's excursion round the farms, but the whizz and kick of the bullets roused him to his best pace, and I confess I was not the last man to reach cover. Fortunately our open order saved us from a single casualty in a way that seemed very wonderful, especially as the Boers had got our range to a nicety. It was impossible to distinguish the Boers on the kopje, except when one of them changed his position.

During this time another small party was creeping up towards the kopje on foot for a direct assault, but found themselves too weak to accomplish it, and asked for reinforcements. A detachment was at once

DISMOUNTED YEOMANRY SKIRMISHERS.

FIRING FROM A KOPJE AT RETREATING BOERS.

despatched, and on the way a ludicrous incident which might have ended badly took place. Among those sent over were two of the best men in the company, mounted on two of the worst horses, a couple of black Argentines, alike in every particular, perfectly useless animals, known as Tweedledum and Tweedledee. They had to cross an exposed belt of ground, and here Tweedledum and Tweedledee, overcome by the firing, halted, and nothing would induce them to budge. In fact their riders had to get off and take cover as best they could, but, strangely enough, neither of these miserable horses was touched.

At last the storming party, finding that the Boer fire had ceased, went on and found the kopje evacuated. The company's bugler (poor fellow, he has since fallen a victim to enteric) proceeded to blow what he explained afterwards was a "Cease fire," for we were still keeping up a desultory fire from the ridge. The officer in charge of us, however, did not recognise the call, but conceived it to be nothing but a Boer ruse. "Don't be deceived by that," he said, "it is only one of their tricks; give it 'em hot." We gave it hot accordingly, especially to a white object, which was declared to be a horse, at the far end of the kopje, until a messenger came in frantic haste to say that our own men were holding the kopje. Fortunately nobody was hit. The white object turned out on closer inspection to be indeed a horse, but one which had been dead for two or three days; it was not, therefore, much the worse for our bombardment. The rest of our battalion had also got into some

tight places, and a number of hairbreadth escapes were recorded, but only one man was killed, and he was curiously enough holding horses, and not in the firing line at all. The colonel had a horse shot under him.

When at last we marched over the kopje that had been our objective, a melancholy sight met our eyes. Several dead bodies of yeomen lay about; one poor fellow had taken out his first field dressing, but had died before he could unroll it; another had tried to write a message, but in his case too the pencil had slipped from his failing fingers. Farther on we came to where the defenders had tried to build schanzes of small stones, and then to the place where the central laager had been. Here was a broken-down waggon, and round it scattered débris, helmets, a few shirts, other remnants of looted stores, and the usual tins. Deep anger and mortification filled our hearts as we gazed upon the pitiful scene, and realised that we had come too late. Usually after an engagement there is a cheerful hum and buzz about the lines, but that night, as we marched in the gathering darkness into the little town, our ranks were as silent and moody as though we had ourselves been defeated. Not a man but would have given all he had, and much more, to have had our fight before instead of after the surrender.

Our efforts were not, however, totally fruitless; two or three prisoners managed to escape from the convoy when it was attacked, and we had also the satisfaction of recovering the wounded in Lindley. Among these was Captain Lord Longford, in command of the Dublin company; he had been shot

in the hand and the neck; he had a horse shot under him, and one of his corporals told me he saw a cigar taken out of his mouth by a bullet; but in spite of his severe wound he had held out till the last, and his party was absolutely the last to surrender. The fortunes of war bring strange meetings; the last time I had seen him was on his wedding day in London not long before, and now I found him lying wounded in an obscure Free State village; not long before his best man on that occasion had died of enteric at Bloemfontein.

By this time the story of the Lindley disaster has been canvassed and discussed more than enough; I would not have dreamed of expressing an opinion on the subject, though of course we did form a very strong opinion from all we heard both at Lindley and at Heilbron, where Colvile's division was, had not it been stated by one of Lord Methuen's staff in his place in the House of Commons that Lord Methuen's officers generally believed that nothing could have been done by Colvile to relieve the Yeomanry. That was very far from being the opinion of all the officers with whom I discussed it. As for the rank and file, I can only say that the news, which we subsequently heard of General Colvile's recall, was no surprise to us. At any rate, if we had thought differently, we would have had sufficient confidence in the judgment of an experienced commander-in-chief who knew all the facts, not a part of them only, not to question his decision.

Next day the infantry with the convoy joined us. They had marched very hard, forty-four miles

in twenty-seven hours, or something like it. We were congratulated on our fine march in orders that day, but as we did not then know about the infantry, we were inclined to be sceptical, and felt conscious that we had not deserved such praise. No doubt the infantry did, all the more because they only arrived the day after, and missed the fight entirely, to their immense disgust. It showed what infantry could do in that country, and besides that there is a solidity about the infantry, that made us all feel that Lindley was now as secure as Cape Town.

CHAPTER XI

AT LINDLEY

PERHAPS no place has seen so much fighting in this war as Lindley. Hardly any member of the South African Field Force serving in the Free State and Transvaal, but has been to Lindley once at least, and few of them I should think have much wish to go there again. The village—for it is hardly more —lies in a tangle of rough desolate hills, admirably suited for the Boer method of fighting, the ideal place for such a trap as that into which the Irish Yeomanry fell. It is a very awkward place to hold, for you can fire into the town from the surrounding hills quite easily, and the only obvious camping-ground just outside the town is particularly exposed. When approaching the place from Kroonstad, it is very difficult to understand why there should be a town at all, but I suppose the explanation is that it is the point where the road from Johannesburg through Heilbron to Bethlehem, Harrismith, and Natal crosses the Valsch River, while it is also about eight hours' journey (at the pace of the country, six miles an hour) from Kroonstad.

When we entered Lindley on June 1, it was the seventh time already that it had been taken and retaken by one side or the other. Indeed, as

a very suspicious-looking Irishman blazing all over with Red Cross badges said to me, "Sure, from day to day, we don't know to what nationality we belong," and I am certain that he himself had proved a worthy rival of the Vicar of Bray. To be an avowed Britisher in Lindley was a dangerous business. When the British troops came in, those with English sympathies naturally thought that their troubles were ended, welcomed the troops and waved Union Jacks, and so on. Next day the town would be evacuated; no sooner were the backs of the rearguard turned than in came the Boers again, and the harrying of the loyalists began, trials for high treason, commandeering, and the rest. Then another occupation, this time really a permanent one it would be said, more demonstrations, and again another evacuation with the like result. I can scarcely find words to praise the steadfast loyalty of those who, in spite of bitter and repeated disappointment, and in the face of personal danger and great pecuniary loss, stuck manfully to their colours as many did in towns like Heilbron and Lindley, especially when they had before their eyes the advantages which fell to those who were friendly to the Boers and did all they could to assist them, and at the same time professed their good-will to us without the slightest danger of reprisals when their duplicity was discovered.

Every house almost seemed to be flying the Red Cross. Here at least was a town whose male population had not vanished; at every turn you came across a truculent-looking ruffian with a Red Cross on his arm, who said he was an orderly in

the Boer hospitals. You would have thought the whole Boer Army Medical Corps had got left behind. There were, of course, a good many wounded, Boer and British, in the town, but these men were for the most part perfectly innocent of any real connection with hospital work; they knew about as much of nursing as some of our own hospital orderlies, though I would be sorry to compare those pseudo Red Cross rascals with our own honest fellows, who make no attempt to conceal their ignorance. The game was perfectly well understood; they rode in, took off bandolier and rifle and put on the Red Cross badge, relying on our forbearance to establish in this manner a complete system of secret intelligence. The same thing was done elsewhere, but I never saw the system brought to greater perfection than here.

The day after our arrival I started off to investigate the resources of the town, and also to visit a wounded friend in the hospital. As usual the orders were very strict against any private soldier entering the town or going to any building without leave; for once I had armed myself with a written order to visit the hospital, which I had obtained with some difficulty. I drew a blank at several likely-looking houses, and all the stores were closed and guarded. At last I found a very singular person who followed the trade of a watchmaker. He was an Englishman by birth, who had been living there for some twenty-five years, under an assumed name, he said; he had married and had several children; his wife was at that moment making the best use of her time by selling

chupatties. He had had a good education in England, and, finding himself possessed of some money, determined to cut a dash. A foreign nobleman undertook to show him life; he saw life, and even on one occasion dined in the company of the Prince of Wales (I tell the story as he told it me). Unfortunately in the process his own money disappeared, as well as some money belonging to a brother and sister. This early brilliance then gave way to a rather checkered career, and eventually he found himself at Lindley. He was among those who were tried for high treason by the Boers. The accusation was that he had been seen wearing a red, white, and blue cockade during the British occupation. His defence was that it was really a Republican cockade. "Send for it," he said to the Court, "you will find it in the coat hanging up on my wall." They did send, and when produced in Court the cockade was found to consist of red, white, blue, and *orange*. He had taken the precaution to send his little girl home to sew a piece of orange ribbon into the cockade. He was acquitted that time, but another time he was condemned to be shot, though the sentence was commuted to perpetual confinement in his own house. He was a very pleasing *raconteur*.

He also gave me some local information about who was baking that day, which was of more practical use, and led to some excellent hot buns. Finally I arrived at a house, and after some pleasant conversation on topics of the day, invited the woman to sell me a couple of the loaves she had

just taken out of the oven. She denied having baked. "What makes you think I had been baking?" "I know that," said I, "and a good deal more. Has your husband got to Liverpool yet?" She was visibly shaken, and absolutely overcome, when I told her I knew the object of his journey, viz. to get a sum of money which had come to him under his mother's will. Out came the loaves, and she would hardly let me pay for them, so amazed was she at my knowledge of her affairs. I expect she still thinks it very mysterious, and does not guess at the simple explanation, that in a small place everybody knows all about his neighbours, and will gossip.

Outside the house I ran into a staff officer, who was very stern and suspicious, but after a stiff encounter I got off safely with my buns and loaves back to camp. Here I found my company had gone out to drive off some snipers, but a smart gallop brought me up to them, and we spent the rest of the day in some mild skirmishing.

The next day was Sunday. We had a church parade on the slope of the hill, and we had a sermon, of which I did not hear a word, and of course we sang "Onward, Christian Soldiers." All the time, and indeed all day, there was the occasional sound of rifle-firing from the outposts; but it was not our turn to go out, and we spent a quiet day. The service was conducted by a corporal of yeomanry, who was, I believe, a curate by profession.

By way of contrast, an instance occurred of the varied use to which corporals can be put. Fire-

wood was exceedingly scarce, and though there were some deserted houses on the outskirt of the town with broken shutters, and other suitable material, there were strict orders against anything being taken. I with several others was sent out on a wood-fatigue to get fuel in any way we could. The corporal in charge of us was not a curate, but a butcher. In despair of getting fuel anywhere else, we went off to one of the broken-down houses in the hope of getting away with some wood before the military police arrived. The corporal followed, reluctant and protestant. We were just securing some pieces of old boxes and other débris, when the military police arrived in hot haste on the scene. They wanted to march us all off under arrest, but we pointed out that we were only acting under the orders of the corporal, and that he must be held solely responsible. The corporal was accordingly, his worst fears realised, marched solemnly off. I think we got a little fuel, in spite of everything. It is not surprising that in the regular army the post of corporal is not greatly sought after.

Early on the morning of the 4th of June we were sent out to relieve a picket of the Shropshire Yeomanry, who had been doing outpost duty on a hill a mile or two out for the past twenty-four hours. Very glad they were to see us, for it was bitterly cold. One of the Shropshire officers was an old contemporary of mine at Eton and Oxford, a good but unlucky cricketer. We bethought us of the different conditions under which we had spent other Fourths of June. "This post," he said, "is all right in the dark, but they begin shooting as

soon as it gets light." They did keep up some sniping all day; the hill we were on faced a kind of semicircle of ridges, and the enemy could get up close enough on both sides so as to put in a cross-fire, but it was at a very long range and not dangerous; still it was difficult to know which side of a stone to get. At one time they got closer, and managed to put some shots among our led horses, which were sheltering under the slope, but no damage was done, only one or two horses were scratched. We could see small parties of Boers galloping about out of range, and occasionally were able to detect a sniper through our glasses, and reply to him. We also pushed out an advance party, which cleared them off a bit. Altogether it was an interesting day, though they never came within a reasonable range. Towards evening the sniping ceased, and a flag of truce came in from Piet de Wet, the Boer commander, to say he would come in for a parley the next day. We expected to have to spend the night on the kopje, but to our great delight a picket of the Yorkshire Light Infantry came out and relieved us; they came clattering up, with their blankets, in a most business-like manner, and immediately began to select their sleeping-places, all as jolly and cheerful as possible. We were extremely grateful. That night we were all extremely happy, for news of the surrender of Pretoria had arrived, false news as it turned out; we were inclined to be sceptical, as the news came from Cape Town and not from headquarters, but it was certain that Johannesburg had fallen, and we felt now that the news about

Pretoria was, if premature, certain to be realised immediately. Piet de Wet did come in to parley, and a local armistice was declared. We waited anxiously to hear the result, and it was rumoured that he had consented to surrender on hearing the news. Later, however, we heard that the conference had been a failure. P. de Wet said his young men were so flushed with their victory over the battalion of yeomanry that they would not hear of surrendering, and that he could only go out himself. Unfortunately this success was followed by the capture of a large convoy going to join Colvile at Heilbron, and the surrender left Christian de Wet free to go off and begin his train-wrecking career, with the capture of the mail-train and the Derby Militia. It certainly looks as though the yeomanry disaster was the cause of the prolongation of the war, for Botha could hardly surrender in the Transvaal, when the Free Staters were scoring such triumphs. It was a piece of cruelly bad luck, most undeserved by him, that our general, Lord Methuen, was just too late to prevent these mishaps; no commander had a more difficult and trying time than he had; it is impossible to see how he could have done more than he did, with the information at his disposal.

CHAPTER XII

TO THE RELIEF OF THE HIGHLANDERS

We left General Paget with a fairly strong force in Lindley, and started on the trek again with three battalions of infantry and about three of yeomanry, besides guns. Beyond a stray shot or two we got out of the hilly tangle round the town without incident. As usual, our line of march was marked by the veldt-fires that, kindled by some chance match or a spark from a pipe, will go on burning in great rings for days. Sometimes, I think, they were kindled by the Boers as a signal, or in order to destroy the grazing for the oxen round a standing camp; very often they arise from mere carelessness on the part of the Kaffirs, who will even light the grass to warm their hands by in the early morning, and then calmly leave it to burn. When a wind is blowing the fires move with great rapidity. Once in the Magaliesberg Hills, not far from Olifant's Nek, a blazing fire swept through our bivouac with a strong wind behind it, and we had only just time to pick up our belongings and hastily move to the other side of a small spruit. It constantly reminded me of the march of the Israelites through the wilderness, for the pillar of smoke by day and the fire by night was nearly always with us. That day, outside Lindley, it was an acci-

dental fire. We were rearguard, and had to halt some time; while we stood, the fire came along and got into a field of ripe mealies. A fine sight it was to see the fire leaping, swaying, and rushing through the tall stalks with a loud roar and crackle; the broad bare track was between us, or we could not have held our ground.

We camped that night on a bare stony hill, about half a mile beyond a drift; it was bitterly cold, and, to add to our discomfort, after an hour or two of waiting, a messenger arrived to say that the company waggon had been upset on the other side of the drift. This is a frequent but very annoying incident of African marching; we were only too lucky in that it had not been upset into the water. We all hurried off, packed up the waggon again, and took over our blankets, if we could find them. But it was too late to make a fire, and so we went cold and supperless to bed. The place was stones all over, and the ground was so hard that the horse-pegs could not be got to hold, and the horses were walking about on top of us all night. For once we were grateful for an early reveille.

The morning march was peaceful enough; not till the afternoon was our equanimity disturbed. I had been hoping for a quiet doze during our midday halt, but I fell a victim to the quartermaster-sergeant, who sent me off on a ration-fatigue right to the other end of the lines. I spent some time in moving and weighing some huge sides of raw beef—a most uncongenial occupation, as you cannot lift them without giving them a hearty embrace—and got back to our own lines to find that the order

to saddle up had been given, and I was rather late.

I was just getting my things together when I heard a loud report followed by the screech of a shell, and realised that the Boers had brought up a couple of guns and were actually shelling us. I did not see the first shell, but the second came with a boom and a bump right into a group of men and horses a little way off me. I just saw the group stumbling outwards every way, and then the cloud of dust hid the whole. As the dust cleared off I wondered what I should see, for this was our first experience of shell fire, but to my astonishment no one was a penny the worse. I believe one or two men were hit elsewhere, but round us the bombardment did no damage, except that one of the officers' servants, who was cooking something in an iron pot, had it smashed to pieces.

Truth compels me to say that this shelling caused a little confusion at first. When I had finished saddling up (I could not move till that was done), I noticed that a good many of the company had taken cover, so that it was clearly safer for those who were left to stay where they were, since the Boers would not shell empty lines. The affair did not last very long; we were soon formed up again, and our guns came up and replied to the enemy. But it delayed us, so we did not advance more than a mile or two, and camped for the night at a place about fifteen miles from Heilbron.

For a novice, shell fire is certainly rather trying to the nerves. With no previous experience of it,

it is impossible to know what is going to happen. There is an uncomfortable interval between the disharge of the gun and the arrival of the shell. Far away on some hillside perhaps you see a little stab of smoke or a flash, then you hear the sound of the explosion; hard on the sound comes the shell itself with a nasty whizzing screech, and for a little bit it is difficult to tell whether it is coming right at you, over you, or to one side. Then all in a moment it is right on you, or past you, has burst or has not, and that is all, and you are watching for the next; with much more confidence, however, when you realise that all the fuss has been for nothing. Personally I never minded the shell fire half so much as rifle fire; bullets, especially at the shorter ranges, come with such a vicious snap and hiss, as though they really meant business. Rifle fire, too, is such a much more personal affair; very likely some particular person is taking a particular aim at you, and will have another try, if he doesn't succeed the first time; most people feel very angry under rifle fire for that reason. Shell fire is quite different; no gunner would aim at an individual man, unless in quite an exceptional case. My pony held a similar view, and was quite indifferent to shells. But I saw some men who had their nerve temporarily quite shaken, and though they recovered afterwards, were not good for much for some days.

The events of the afternoon were clear proof that we should not get the big convoy we were conducting along those fifteen miles into Heilbron without a struggle. Rumour was very busy as

to the difficulties in which the Highland Brigade with Colvile and Macdonald were involved. We knew that a convoy on its way to join them had been cut off, and it was said that they were being very hard pressed, and were very short of food. Worst of all, it was whispered that they were on the point of surrendering, even that they had been cut to pieces, or had already surrendered. At any rate we felt a good deal of anxiety about them, and it was regarded as a certainty that we should have a stiff fight next day.

This was the first time that we had bivouacked for the night with the absolute assurance of a battle the next day. There may be soldiers who have some special feelings on the "night before battle," but I must honestly confess I never came across them. Of course I can well understand a general or a colonel or anybody holding some responsible command feeling nervous and excited and perhaps unable to sleep, but it is quite different for the common soldier. He is so absolutely in the hands of fate, nothing he can say or do or think will have the slightest effect; to-morrow he will just have to do as he is bid; there is the same camp routine as usual; as usual, battle or no battle to-morrow, his evening meal to-day demands his urgent attention; probably it is cold outside his blankets, and once in them, wise or foolish, thinking or unthinking, hero or coward, he is soon wrapped in the sound slumber of a healthy tired man.

Somebody was nervous that evening; we did not know who, but the proof of it filtered down to us in the order that the guards that night should be

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trebled. That meant that more than half the company would be kept from their beds. The treble guards were appointed in all solemnity; I cannot tell what happened in other companies, but I know that in ours, two of the three slept as peacefully as usual during their sentry-go, except when the officer of the watch went his rounds.

In the morning we breakfasted on the thought of coffee and a pipe (we were on half-rations at this period), and started on our way about an hour before dawn. My troop was flanking patrol on the right, with one troop in front; on our right lay a range of hills, with one commanding hill known as Spitz Kop, well out of rifle range of the road, but in some places within shell range; between the hills and the road was an undulating country very suitable for Boer tactics, if we had had no protecting fringe of mounted men. Anybody can see the extraordinary necessity for mounted men for these duties in that kind of country. No infantry fringe would be any good two or three miles out; the fringe would be overwhelmed and cut off before they could move in; and the fringe must be that distance out to keep the enemy out of range of the main body, and prevent ambuscades. Even a fringe of dummies on horseback would be better than none at all, for the enemy would be chary of approaching them. The proof of the need for mounted men was clearly seen along the Lindley-Heilbron road. Colvile, marching the same road with a larger infantry force and a smaller convoy, but only a few mounted men, suffered a great many more casualties than we did, hampered by a large

convoy, fighting the same enemy only a week after, but we had a good force of yeomanry. I would not be surprised to hear that some of Colvile's division, when they were told that they were to be joined by a battalion of yeomanry, were not particularly enthusiastic, but I am also quite certain that after their experience along that road, they were very glad to be joined by Lovat's Scouts at Heilbron.

As soon as it got light the troop in front of us came into action; we could not see them, for at the moment a rise in the ground hid them, but we could hear. That to my mind is the most trying time, in the early morning to hear firing going on just in front of you, to know that you will be in it in a few moments, and not to have an idea of what is forward. Once you are in it yourself you are too much occupied to mind.

Again the company had the most extraordinary luck in the absence of casualties; though we were right out on the flank which the Boers were attacking, and were under shell and rifle fire for several hours, we did not have a single casualty, though there were several among the yeomanry who formed the rearguard.

It was a very interesting day. On the most part our fighting consisted of being shot at from all ranges from 200 yards upwards, without any opportunity of returning the fire; our business was to get the convoy through, not to pursue the enemy; but two or three times we did have some dismounted work, and got some shooting, which is always cheering. In fact one of our troops

were only stopped by a wire fence within about forty yards of a body of the enemy; and how they ever got out of the mess without loss is a mystery.

The Boers made some very good practice with their guns, and killed one or two of the niggers with the convoy. Of course they had had practice on that road before, and knew the range exactly. The first two or three shells they fired pitched right into my troop, by accident I expect, for after that they shot well over our heads towards the centre of the column. It was a pretty sight to see our gunners replying. I was in a good position to see the duel, right between. The enemy had been all over the ground in front of us, and it was interesting to see the trail of their guns, though our gunners can move in quite as rough country as theirs. They also left behind some very good horses, which we captured, and useful they were, for some of our mounts were hardly more than scarecrows by this time.

After all we had heard about the Highland Brigade, it was with great pleasure that we rode into their outposts at Heilbron, and saw the Seaforth tartan safe and sound. They were all right, but were very glad our convoy was coming, as they had eaten their last biscuits two days before, and were on very short commons.

Even then the Boers were still hanging on our flank, and we did not get into camp just outside the town till about five o'clock. As we marched in a man rushed out, waving a paper in his hand. Eagerly we asked the news. "Official

A VETERAN ENGLISH HORSE AFTER A YEAR'S SERVICE.

THE WRECK OF A GOOD HORSE.

announcement: unconditional surrender of Pretoria by Botha." Of course we thought the war was over.

That was a good ending to an exciting day. Tired and hungry as we were, it was better than refreshment. We slept sound that night, at least such of us as were not, like myself, on guard.

CHAPTER XIII

HEILBRON AND BACK TO THE RAILWAY

In a country so scriptural as South Africa it is no surprise to arrive at a place called Hebron, for I suppose that Heilbron is only a substitute for Hebron, especially as there is also a Bethlehem to the south-east of Lindley. Heilbron is another of the much-evacuated, much-occupied towns, where the loyalists have had to suffer frequent changes of master. It is a pleasant town, and even boasts a railway to itself; there is a branch from the main line starting at Wolvehoek, just south of the Vaal; it is destined some day to be continued, *viâ* Lindley and Bethlehem, to Harrismith, which is now the terminus of the Ladysmith line through Van Reenen's Pass.

Unlike Lindley, the town lies in a very defensible position on a group of small hills; as usual, rather an imposing church occupies a commanding position in the central square, and overlooks the surrounding country. Quite a decent stream flows through. There are some very good houses in the town, generally standing in enclosures of garden or orchard, which give the place a very agreeable impression of greenery and roomy ease. There are some good stores and a considerable air of business prevails (or would do so in peaceful times),

for the railway makes the whole difference of being in the world or out of it. Altogether it is a pleasant place enough.

Our camp was next to the Seaforths. The sight of them marching to the sound of their pipes carried me back to Inverness. I saw in the distance one of their officers who had fagged for me at Eton. I think I would have presumed on ancient authority to speak to him if I had been near enough —not so with another acquaintance of other days, whom I had the honour of seeing and saluting in the town, Brigadier-General Hector Macdonald; the gulf between a general and a private is too great for more.

Besides the Highland Brigade there were at Heilbron a couple of naval 5-inch guns, with their detachment. They were very useful, and served to keep the Boers at a good distance off. Whenever a party appeared within range, a shell sent them flying, and the boom set us on the tip-toe of expectation.

There were a good many sick and wounded in the hospitals, which were very crowded, and there was a good deal of probably unavoidable suffering. The railway was cut, and it was impossible to get proper supplies; bedding especially was particularly scarce. It was an ill place at which to go into hospital, but we left six or seven invalids behind there.

I shall not easily forget a Somersetshire family living in one of the best houses in the town. The lady of the house did her own baking and most of the cooking; a real downright English countrywoman she was. I am ashamed to think of how

we penetrated into her kitchen and talked of many things, including "dear old Zummerzet," before we arrived at the real point and aim of our manœuvres, loaves. A ration of three biscuits a day must be our only excuse for this unscrupulous deceitfulness: our few words of dialect were purely second-hand, but either they or the good lady's general kindness of heart, produced two good loaves at a very moderate price. I am sorry to say that on another visit to Heilbron, when I went out of pure gratitude to see her again, she was not at all pleased to see me, but I bless her memory for all that.

A much more humble abode was a cottage on the outskirts of the town occupied by a Dutch mother and daughter, whose family possessed a farm somewhere in the neighbourhood. The mother was a very solemn old lady; every night she used to read and expound a chapter out of the great family Bible, and she would always finish to the end in spite of any interruption. The daughter was quite exceptionally pretty for a Boer, and very friendly, in spite of the fact that her father and brother were out on commando against us. She spoke English well and sold us chickens and eggs with great goodwill, but I think my companion, a persuasive Irishman, who got his commission about that time, got them much cheaper than I did.

There was a good deal of shooting about the outposts the day we were there, and one of Lovat's Scouts was wounded, and among the Dutch in the town there were some very sinister rumours about the destruction of the railway and other disasters, which turned out to have a good deal of foundation.

We left Heilbron and marched westwards towards the railway. Along with us came some companies of the Black Watch, strapping fellows, marching with great strides, their kilts covered with a khaki apron. In the daytime they have the advantage of their trousered comrades, but during those cold nights I should imagine the kilt must be rather trying.

Some little way beyond the Heilbron outposts, the ground begins to get rugged again, and here we were a good deal bothered by some Boers who hung upon our flank. They were holding a ridge running parallel to that on which our main column was advancing, and kept firing from it, and from a house which stood just below the ridge. Between ran the river, no very great stream; and on both sides of the river was some very rough ground up and down, perhaps three-quarters of a mile in extent in all. Rightly or wrongly, we always thought that the colonel had a particular liking for our company beyond the three others which made up the battalion, and we were not surprised on this occasion, when we were ordered out to clear the ridge. We collected behind a bluff of the hills on our side of the valley, then trotted out, and formed into a long line, and so went at a gallop across the valley. What a comfort to have a real good gallop again, after so many miles of trekking at a walk or the humblest of trots! From the hill behind us our guns thundered a most inspiriting music; the shrapnel screamed and whistled overhead. There is nothing more enlivening than hard riding to the tune of

your own artillery. Down into the donga we went, and out again faster and faster. It was impossible to resist shouting as we rode; I understood then why a hound gives tongue. How many Boers there might be on the ridge, we had no idea; I think they soon retired at the sight of our coming, and the fire of the guns—at any rate I only heard a few bullets. Just in front of me lay the house under the ridge; between was a barbed-wire fence with only one opening so far as I could see. I thought they would be waiting till we were huddled together at the wire, and so I galloped as hard as I could to get through among the first, slipping a cartridge into my rifle as I went. Just as I got through, one of our shrapnel burst just in front, raking the ground and spattering the house, a good piece of gunnery, for it would have considerably disturbed anybody firing from the house. Then some dismounted and lined the ridge, others burst into the house and dragged out four Italians, gibbering with fright. At the time it was impossible to tell whether those particular men had been fighting or not, but certainly the house had been used as a refuge and storehouse by a Boer picket; so in the excitement of the moment the house was burned, and the four men were secured. Two of our men venturing some way farther out from the ridge nearly fell into an ambush, and only escaped out of a hot fire by running. We held the ridge for some time till the column had gone by, and then rejoined the main body with our prisoners.

I am sorry for those poor Italians; they were

released next day, and I was told by a farmer in the neighbourhood that they were working as stone-masons in Heilbron, and, with the cleverness of their race, were also conducting a market-garden business jointly. Probably the Boers had forced themselves upon them; in consequence, poor people, they got a terrible fright and considerable loss of property. On the other hand, they had been warned to come in to Heilbron with all their goods, and, if the penalty they paid for disregarding the warning was a severe one, I do not see how it could have been helped. War can never be conducted so as to benefit the people living within its area.

As for ourselves, we all felt in extremely good spirits after this little incident. The danger had certainly been, as it turned out, exceedingly minute, but we did not know it beforehand, and so we all felt extremely pleased with ourselves, and quite ready to do any amount of fighting.

Next day we had no fighting ourselves. We were patrolling and scouting out on the left flank of the column, as it marched towards the railway; about ten o'clock we could distinctly hear the sound of big guns booming on our left front a good way off. I was sent off to report this to the colonel, and a long ride I had, for we were several miles out, and it was not easy to find out where the regiment had got to. When I did find the colonel, I was covered with dust, and my pony was about dead beat and could gallop no more; he naturally expected I had some important message to give. I could not help being amused as I gave my

message, for at that moment the guns were booming so loud, that anybody but a deaf man could hear them. The guns must have been C. de Wet's on the railway near Roodeval.

With a tired horse I could do nothing but stop and watch the column go by, and an interesting sight it is to see an army on the march. Far ahead are the advance-guard skirmishing in a long line on both sides of the track, then the general with his staff, marching probably, as his custom is, on foot, a custom which endears him to his infantry soldiers, but not so much to his staff, who could seldom keep it up as long as he. Then comes a little group with some mysterious packages wrapped up in cloth; these they unfold, and screw together a couple of little looking-glasses on a tripod. It is the heliograph; they try flashes all round the compass; then from near Heilbron the winking, blinking flashes answer. That is no good, for we know all about them. At last it comes from right in front this time, the hill above the railway by Vredefort Road, and a long conversation begins, but not one that a casual bystander can understand: only he can be sure that we are marching towards our friends. After the heliograph comes a battery escorted by two or three companies of yeomanry, then a long train of waggons headed and flanked by a battalion of infantry. Then the ambulance, they would be in front if we expected an action to-day; then more guns and more infantry, till we get back to the yeomanry rearguard; on both sides of course, are flankers of infantry, and beyond them, a long way out, more yeomanry. All this in

the brilliant sunshine is worth going far to see, though looking closely at the procession it is evident that, even if we had our bands, we should cut but a sorry figure in Hyde Park or at Aldershot. This column is for business, not show.

Towards the afternoon the heliograph became furiously active, and a sergeant from one of the posts on the railway arrived in camp during the midday halt. He brought the first of a series of bad news. A post of some twenty yeomanry south of his on the railway had been captured by De Wet. Then the news got worse and worse. The Derby militia had been captured after a short but severe fight. A train with stores and mails had been captured, and the mails burned. De Wet was fairly astride of the line of communications, and nothing could reach Lord Roberts's army from the south. Of all this nothing affected us so much as the news that a number of mail-bags had been tied together in a line and burned. We hated the Boers with a strong loathing for such a useless act of wanton barbarity. As for the rest we felt no doubt of our ability to reopen the communications, and sweep De Wet away, even if we had not joined hands that evening with a force that came down from the north with Lord Kitchener. But burnt mails no fighting could restore, and we feared that we had lost about three weeks' mails in the wreck. Rage filled our breasts, and I do not believe that a man of us lay down that night but felt a real satisfaction at the prospect of a fight on the morrow, and the chance of inflicting some punishment for this rascally deed.

CHAPTER XIV

FIGHTING ON THE RAILWAY

De Wet was known to be encamped about ten miles down the line at Rhenoster River, and we were on the move betimes. There had been a tremendously heavy dew, the whole ground was white with the hoar-frost, and over all hung a thick mist, not often seen in this part of South Africa. It was bitterly cold, and we were more than usually grateful when the sun rose to warm our chilled fingers and dry our limbs, wet with leading our horses through the long grass. It would have been a dreary march but for one of my officers, who had all the news from the north; how Johannesburg and Pretoria were captured, and the prisoners released, and the battle of Diamond Hill with its sad casualties. To hear all this in full detail almost at first hand, after the occasional bare bones of news which had been our fare for so long, was indeed a pleasant change, though it was miserable to think that the first result of the battle we were going to fight would be to pass on heart-breaking news to those to whom we would so gladly have spared it.

As we drew near to Kopje station some large columns of smoke rose in the air, and the loud reports which followed told that De Wet was completing his task of destroying the railway. After a

short rest by the side of a large dam the attack began. My troop was told off as escort to the guns, which turned out to be very advantageous from a spectacular point of view; for, although we did not have any shooting ourselves, we were in a very good central position for seeing the whole thing, and there are few sights more worth the watching than a good number of big guns in action.

De Wet had his main laager in the bed of the Rhenoster River, a position which, when I examined it afterwards, seemed to be of almost impregnable strength. It is a typical South African river running between very high banks, the tops of which are themselves only on a level with the surrounding country; the tops of the bank were carefully prepared, holes having been dug in a sort of crenellation to hold riflemen. Unless, therefore, a shell happened to pitch right on the edge of the bank, no harm would be done, and you might go on pitching shells right into the river-bed all day without shaking the defence. He had six guns all so posted with the remainder of his force that the river lay between him and us, except on the left of his position and our right, where he was holding a number of strong kopjes, which looked very formidable to assault.

Even when you are in the centre of the position it is exceedingly difficult to take in all the details of a battle; even from eye-witnesses you will hear the most widely differing accounts of the same action; in time, I suppose, a particular account comes to be agreed upon as the correct one; but I shall always henceforth feel doubtful as to whether it is a real

account of what happened, or only a resultant of different stories, perhaps further from the truth than any of them.

The action began with the artillery; we had twenty-two guns in action—howitzers firing lyddite shells, 15-pounders firing shrapnel, and pom-poms. Lyddite shell and shrapnel together make a pretty combination. It is easy to tell the difference by the sound in the air. The lyddite shell from the howitzer goes on its way in a much more leisurely fashion, buzzing thoughtfully to itself as it were, as it describes its lofty arch; when it pitches, the effect from far appears to be tremendous; you see a great column of yellow smoke rise up, and the tremendous thud of the explosion follows after. The shrapnel screams along in a busy way, and, as it bursts with a crack and a flash in the air, you feel you can almost hear the rattle of the shower of bullets; it is far the most ornamental kind of artillery fire. While the howitzers were sowing the river-bed with lyddite, the 15-pounders kept searching the kopjes held by the enemy, and preparing them for the attack of the infantry. This was the first time I had seen the infantry going to the attack; looking at the long wavy lines sauntering quietly along, it was difficult to believe that they really were attacking, so unconcerned they looked, and even bored at taking part in what was comparatively such a small affair after Modder River, Magersfontein, or Paardeberg. Our guns redoubled their attention to the ridges under attack, the ground hid the advancing lines from our sight, but the sharp outburst of rifle fire told its own tale. It was not

long before we ceased firing, though the long-range howitzers continued, and we heard that the kopjes were taken. All this time aides-de-camp were galloping wildly about behind us, in that confused manner which is peculiar to them. They dash up and ask you if you know where Colonel so-and-so is; before you have time to answer they are off, probably in the direction from which they came. This movement adds considerable picturesqueness to the battlefield. When our orders did really come to move, it was the general himself who personally brought them. And we limbered up and trotted away under his direction to another point, from which we could recommence our bombardment with more effect.

We were still on the hills, and commanded a good view of the plain in front. We could see a number of tents standing below, not very far from the river and the railway, and fondly imagined that we had really struck upon a Boer laager at last, though we were rather puzzled by their having tents exactly like ours; we explained it, however, by supposing that they must be tents which the Boers had captured from us.

Meantime the mounted troops had been spreading out on both flanks, and we hoped that they would have been able to work round to the rear of the position. From our hills it looked quite possible to surround and capture the whole Boer force. I never knew why some such movement was not attempted. Perhaps it was, and possibly the orders went astray. In the afternoon the Boer gunners managed to locate the battery I was with, and replied to our

fire with a few shells. The first two pitched right into my troop, and burst very fairly well; they were segment shells, but not a man or a horse was touched. The next fell exactly in the same manner among the troop in front of us belonging to another battalion, and several men were wounded—another instance of our great luck in the matter of casualties. Soon after this the Boers began to retire, and we could see them streaming away to the south and west across the open plain in batches of six or seven or more. The gunners said they were yeomanry who had come round from behind, but, though we implored them to fire, they would not be convinced of their error till it was too late and little damage could be done. I suppose they were quite right not to fire unless they were absolutely certain, but we were absolutely certain, and it was very tantalising to see the enemy escaping before our eyes.

Soon after we saw our men advancing through the white tents, and into the bed of the river; the fight was over for the day, and the last I saw of it was the Boer ambulance waggon trekking slowly away across the plain on the track of the retreating horsemen. It was too late to make any further pursuit that night; even if our horses had been good enough to attempt it. To our chagrin the tents turned out to be the Imperial Yeomanry Hospital, which had been coming up to Pretoria, and had been warned by De Wet of his coming fight with the Derby Militia; accordingly they had pitched their tents and waited; surely the only instance in war in which the hospital has been the first to arrive on the scene of the battle, and spread

out its implements and tables all in readiness beforehand. The tents were full of wounded men. The results of our battle were not so decisive as it seemed they might have been, but at any rate we had taken some prisoners, and turned De Wet out of the strong position which he occupied astride of our lines of communication.

Our labours were not yet over for the day; our waggons came up late, and had to cross the deep and difficult drift to get into camp. As usual, one got upset in the middle, and it was a fearful business getting it out, and pulling the rest over. It was quite two in the morning before the whole transport was got over, and then principally owing to the devoted efforts of one of my company officers.

All along here the railway was in the most fearful mess: the Boers who had done the wrecking had thoroughly enjoyed their work, and to make it more artistic they had twisted the rails in many places so that they stuck forlornly up into the air. Not only the original line which the enemy had partly destroyed when retreating before the main column of Lord Roberts's army, but also the subsidiary line, which the engineers had laid down alongside, were both thoroughly destroyed, especially the bridge over the Rhenoster, and several culverts. Another unhappy sight was the place where the mail-train had been wrecked and many of its contents burned. The ground was strewn with letters and fragments of letters for a long way round; most of these were afterwards collected and sent on to their addresses so far as possible. I myself got a letter here addressed to my sister;

it was, I am sorry to say, nothing more interesting than a bill; and one man picked up the wrapper of a parcel addressed to himself, but the contents were unhappily gone. Our own particular mails had by a lucky chance escaped being in the train, although they had been ordered to be taken in it, and we got them a few days later, a most welcome windfall, after we had despaired of them. Besides the letters there were lying about a great variety of articles of clothing, mostly half burnt, and some ammunition for the big naval guns, each shell almost too big for one man to lift. A good deal of the clothing we managed to recover. Every night that we were in this neighbourhood parties went out with carts or waggons to all the farms or kraals near, and thoroughly searched them. In this way we got a good deal; one of the things which was not least appreciated was a Buzzard cake; I afterwards met the man to whom it really belonged; he, poor fellow, was doubtless sighing for it at the time, and he was very angry when he heard about it afterwards. I myself obtained several articles of underclothing, which afforded me the greatest possible delight. There are dreadful results of wearing the same clothes for too long a time: however carefully you may wash yourself when you get a chance, and however carefully you search your clothes, unless you can get a change now and then, it is impossible to avoid being infested by that particular kind of parasite the *lis vestimenti*, to give it its decent Latin name. I believe this little animal means very well and he does not bite, but he causes the most intense irritation, especially at night, by simply

walking about over your skin; in the daytime he generally remains in the corners of your clothes, and hence a complete change of clothing is an absolute cure. It is a curious sight to see the men sitting in their lines at a midday halt stripped almost naked, diligently searching their clothes like monkeys. It sounds very horrible, and so it is; but it is true, and that must be my apology for mentioning it. At any rate it will explain my delight at getting a change of clothes.

There was a strong rumour to the effect that Kroonstad had fallen into the hands of the Boers, and as we had only left a very small garrison there when we marched out, we had some fears that it might be true. We set out along the line southward, but when we got to America siding we heard definite news that Kroonstad was safe, and accordingly halted. We were not long at rest, however, for news came that De Wet had again appeared on the line, and was attacking, unsuccessfully as it fortunately turned out this time, the post at Rhenoster, and we turned our faces northwards once more. As it happened, the enemy did not wait for our arrival, but made off.

I have seldom seen greater *sang froid* than that displayed by certain railway pioneers whom I came across that day. I was riding by myself a good way out to the left of the railway, when I saw three white men sitting on ant-hills right out in the middle of the veldt. I rode up, amazed beyond measure at their appearance, and asked who they were. "Railway pioneers mending a culvert down yonder." "But what in Fortune's name are you doing

here?" "Resting: we were captured by the Boers this morning, but they released us about fifteen miles from here, and we are just getting back." To them apparently it was all a matter of course, just an ordinary incident in the day's work; they made no more bones about it, than if they had been sitting on a bench in Hyde Park, during an evening stroll.

We found the Boers had made a determined attack on the Rhenoster post, but had been beaten off that day without loss to us. They were even then close at hand, and a little skirmishing took place along the line to the north. The Boers made some good shell practice in the dark. They were on the railway, where of course the distances are marked, and thus they knew exactly what distance they were from the station, where they judged that a number of our men were sure to be. There were some narrow escapes, but our gunners could not reply, because they had no means of judging the distance, and after a time the Boers moved their guns away.

The line was now completely open, and we spent several days here, replenishing our stores, getting a few remounts, and resting. Sunday, June 17, stands out among those days, for it was very wet, but we also got three weeks of mails.

A SUCCESSFUL FORAGE.

THE COOK MAKES HIS AFTER-DINNER COFFEE.

CHAPTER XV

UP AND DOWN THE COUNTRYSIDE

DURING the next three or four weeks we were constantly on the move up and down the country which lies about Heilbron, Lindley, Kroonstad, and the railway. Seldom, if ever, did we sleep two nights in the same camp. As I have since learned from a study of the despatches, our business all this time was to keep the enemy off the lines of communication, a difficult and troublesome operation, which any general might be glad to have performed for such a length of time as ours did without mishap against so enterprising and daring a foe. But at the time we heard nothing whatever of the object of our operations. To us it was an incessant round of early reveilles, long marches, night guard and picket, and all the other ordinary routine, apparently without any aim or purpose whatsoever. When we did come up with the enemy, the attack never seemed to be pressed home; once or twice it happened that we made a long dash, found the enemy in a strong position, lost a man or two in driving him off, and then, when we were hoping to bivouac on the ground and take up our pursuit in the morning, back we would tramp to camp fifteen or twenty weary miles, feeling disheartened

and disgusted. Or else we would find the orders for the day suddenly countermanded; there would be a hasty saddling up, and we would march away with immense despatch and high hopes that something was forward, only to return next day to the same camp once more, with horses just a little more worn out and nothing more. I cannot help thinking it would have been better if we had been told something of what was going on. I cannot see any objection to troops being given some general idea of their position, their object, and their relation to other forces; it would add so enormously to the interest of life, and the men would be fifty times as keen if they felt that they really were moving as a part of the great machine, not to suit somebody's purposeless whim. But we never heard anything at all, even after the event, except by accident, and I do not believe our officers did either. A great secrecy was maintained as to our movements, and in particular a false hour of reveille used to come out in orders. Day after day reveille would be announced for 6 or 6.30 A.M., and regularly altered later in the evening to 3 or 4. Presumably the idea was that the Boers would be deceived by this, but, as the real hour of starting was always to be ascertained by asking the headquarters cook what time breakfast was ordered, I have my doubts as to the efficiency of the plan.

Of course no one wants to have an army composed of amateur strategists, but there is a great difference between that and keeping the

soldiers and even the regimental officers in complete ignorance of what is going on and what has been going on. It cannot be good for the efficiency of an army that its members should fall into the condition of an infantry-man whom I came across one day on the march. He knew not where he was, how far he was going, or whither; he did not know, and, fordone and broken in spirit by long toil, he did not care; yet he marched on out of sheer obedience, dragging his legs one after another.

In the absence of authentic news a great variety of rumours cropped up, enough to suit every palate. We were holding the enemy in check till French should have got round behind him. Hamilton with an army of 35,000 men was starting out from Standerton; we had fairly driven the Boers into the arms of Buller, who had come up from Natal, and so on. When none of these things happened, and it seemed that we might go on doing this interminably, a curiously strong wave of home-sickness began to sweep over our country-bred ranks. There was a great deal of grumbling, and some very hearty fellows became quite despondent. Then more rumours arose to suit this state of feeling. Lord Roberts had fixed July 7 for the mobilisation of the Yeomanry with a view to return; the *Majestic* had been ordered to prepare for our arrival at Cape Town, and was to sail with us at the end of July. Somebody had seen the very order. All sorts of similar tales were believed, and when they were shown to be false,

others based on the same or worse authority were as eagerly believed. That phase passed, of course, like any other mood, and it recurred from time to time, but it was perhaps worse then than at any other time.

Great part of our time was spent upon the road between Heilbron and the railway; we became familiar with every inch of the country. At the beginning of the time I am speaking of part of our column preceded us, and had a very pretty fight with De Wet just outside Heilbron; at least they said so, much to our chagrin, for we were a day's march behind them. This was near a place called Elandslaagte—the Valley of the Eland. One of the puzzling parts of South African geography is that there are so many places called by the same name, and when you get there it is not really a place at all. The Dutch seem to have bestowed names as they trekked along, and as they were limited both in imagination and vocabulary, they never could get beyond such names as Elandslaagte, Driefontein, Spitz Kop, Pardekraal, or Nooitgedacht. The names are usually descriptive, though there are no elands in Elandslaagte now, nor any rhinoceroses in the Rhenoster River.

After some backward and forward marches we went in again to Heilbron. My troop was flanking patrol on the right; our lieutenant was unfortunately away ill, and it was perhaps owing to this circumstance that two or three pigs which were wandering at large formed an irresistible attraction to the greater part of the troop, when they should have been devoting themselves to scouting work.

I must say in excuse there was a butcher among them, and our supplies were very low. The chase was proceeding with much zest and amusement, for the pigs were exceedingly dexterous and nimble, when several unexpected bullets considerably scattered the chasers and put an end to the pursuit. I had ridden on ahead, and climbed a hill on which was a Kaffir kraal, to get a good look round the country ; I asked the Kaffir whether he had seen any Boers lately, and he told me that they always fired at him from the opposite hills if he went down to get water before dark. Then he became very excited, his voice rose to the extraordinarily high pitch which only a Kaffir can reach, and he pointed me out a small party of Boers riding along a hillside about a mile and a half away. Right down below them, apparently within easy range, was my troop sitting placidly upon their horses, recovered from the confusion of the pig chase, but quite unconscious of any danger. I went down, and with the sergeant and one or two more, we got round under the shelter of a hill to a place, where we could get a good view of the Boers without their seeing us. It was a long range, but we gave them a few rounds which startled them a good deal in their turn, but we could not see if any damage was done. Not very long after we came to the Heilbron outpost, there came out to meet us a most capital fellow, one of Lovat's Scouts. He had been on guard all night, but had stayed on during the morning after he was relieved, out of pure zeal, and hearing the firing came out to see what it was. He told us that this party

of Boers had been particularly annoying for several days, and he was very anxious for us to come out with him on a stalking expedition. Unfortunately we could not get enough to go. Of all the volunteer corps I saw Lovat's Scouts struck me as equal to any, if not superior—thoroughly good fellows, always ready to do anything and go anywhere.

Coming out of Heilbron, we marched this time along the Heilbron-Kroonstad road, if such mere tracks worn on the surface of the open veldt can be called roads. The farms hereabouts had an exceedingly prosperous look. One in particular nestles under the shelter of two low kopjes on the banks of the Rhenoster River, which is there no more than a brook, though it runs in the bed of a river. It has more outhouses and sheds than usual, and the Kaffir servants have a sort of location of their own. The name of the owner, P. Botha, was carved in several places on the stone side-posts of the door. The house itself is a two-storeyed one with low rooms, but clean and comfortable, evidently belonging to higher-class Boers. When we reached the place on a patrol some distance out from the column, we saw a couple of horsemen disappearing in the distance. Old Mrs. Botha sat in front of the door, leaning both hands upon her stick, frowning steadily with bended brow; around her were grouped a number of children, and six or seven women and girls, probably her daughters, all looking very fresh and young, and some of them quite pretty. The whole group made one of the pleasantest pictures I had seen for many a day. I do not suppose the women really were pretty, but they looked so smiling and

clean and nice, that it was impossible not to think so. They declared they knew nothing of the horsemen we had seen, and had not even seen them, which may have been true or may not; anyhow the men were gone, and there was nothing left to do but to bargain for some of the numerous turkeys that were cackling and gobbling about the house. We bought a few at a very moderate price, and I am sorry to think that some of the company got a number of geese at a little distance from the farm at a still more moderate price while we were bargaining at the farm. Even the old lady quite thawed and the whole party became very friendly, but we did not neglect to keep a sentry or two posted, for we were a good way from the main body in what was supposed to be the direction of a Boer laager. The master of the house was away, but whether he was dead or out on commando was more than my imperfect Dutch would enable me to make out. They all laughed heartily at my broken Dutch, for I was the interpreter of the party. Bad my Dutch certainly was, but it was not so bad as that of a staff officer (a real good fellow, whom we knew from several foraging expeditions), who joined us at the farm; he wanted to buy some eggs, but they understood him to say that he wanted them hard-boiled. I rescued them out of the pot for him, but I have often wondered since how they turned out in the end. I have kindly recollections of the family of P. Botha, and I can only hope that they have escaped all the dangers and devastation of war; for that part of the country has suffered most severely, and has little to thank De Wet for.

Sometime after this we must have been close upon the Boer commandant, for we made an immense haul of sheep which he had been collecting, though how he ever expected to be able to carry them about the country is more than I can tell. This was at one of the numerous places called Pardekraal, such a confused tangle of hill and valley, deep dongas and steep banks, that you would have thought the Boers would have chosen it to fight in, if they ever meant to fight at all. We did have one of the unsatisfactory skirmishes I have spoken of, rather a bigger one than usual, the next day, fifteen or twenty miles to the east, but the Boers never meant to stand. It was always the same; their principle was, "He who fights and runs away, will live to fight another day," but who runs the first time will probably run the second also; such tactics can never win in the end. Brave as they were in some sort, the Boers never seemed, in all we saw of them, to have that ultimate courage which stakes its all on victory or nothing, and recognises no third alternative.

Such a foe is, however, annoying enough; small parties kept buzzing round us, and one or two officers venturing out to shoot beyond the outposts mysteriously disappeared, and a message would arrive next day asking that their kit might be sent out to them. These were generally, as far as I remember, officers belonging to the Intelligence department, but I suppose such a thing might happen to anybody.

We in our turn made a capture which looked very well on paper, but was less glorious in fact.

This was Andries Wessels, once commandant of the Boer forces before Kimberley. A poor soldier, I should judge, but not at all a bad farmer; he had a good farm and well stocked. We riding on in the advance-guard came to the farm and surrounded it, and presently learned that we had made prize of Andries Wessels and two or three others, with their rifles and bandoliers. It turned out that poor Wessels was laid up with an injured leg, and had been entertaining a small tea-party; I cannot think that any of the party had a great objection to being captured.

Indirectly this led to an incident which caused us at the time a great deal of vexation and disappointment. The night after this capture we were still in the same place, and reveille was ordered for 6 A.M. the next morning. The headquarters cook knew of nothing to the contrary, and all seemed well. Just as I was dozing off to sleep, I heard the orderly come with an order that we were to be all ready saddled and armed by 1 A.M. No baggage of any kind was to be taken, we were to march in light fighting order. Naturally we were full of expectation, as we saddled our horses in the bitter cold and paraded well before our time. Silently we marched out, two regiments of yeomanry and a couple of pom-poms, with orders not to talk and not to smoke. Not a word was told us of the purpose of our march; it looked as though we were going to surprise some Boer laager, or cut off a convoy which was trying to slip past us at night. On and on we marched and still nothing happened. With the unmistakable

Southern Cross before your eyes nothing is easier than to mark your direction by the stars, and as we marched and marched it became clear that we were moving on a curve. At first this did not create any misgivings; naturally we were making a detour to get behind them; but time passed, still we were marching on a semicircle, and still nothing happened. At last, when we halted, the Southern Cross was swinging low on the horizon to the right of us, though it had been well on the left when we started. It was a little before 4 A.M., and our colonel, who is fond of a saturnine joke, coming past, said, "Men, you will not be surprised to hear that we have lost our way." So back to camp we went, a cold, weary, sleepy, discontented crew, still perfectly ignorant of the object of our mysterious expedition. Nor were we ever told anything at all about it, but I discovered by diligent inquiry that Wessels's servant had volunteered to lead us to a place where thirty Boers were accustomed to sleep every night. Whether it was merely a ruse to entrap a small body of ours, which was frustrated by the strength of our force, or whether it was genuine information and the man really lost his way, or pretended to because his heart failed him at the last moment, I never knew.

There is still a certain amount of game left in this district. One day that we were on outpost duty, as I was doing my turn of sentry lying among some mealies on a hill, a herd of about 200 blesboks filed majestically past me at about 150 yards' distance. There were some beautiful heads among them, and my fingers itched upon the trigger. The

orders were very strict against shooting any game, and of course when actually on sentry it would have been a gross breach of discipline to fire except on some alarm. So I let them go by, the less unwillingly, because blesbok are somewhat rare now, and so large a herd of them is an uncommon sight. They were foolish enough, however, to come within range of my supporting picket half-a-mile behind me, who were less scrupulous than I and bagged a fine buck, which proved a very welcome addition to our pot.

Our march brought us once again to the vicinity of Lindley, but though we could see the familiar kopjes in the distance, we did not enter the town, but turned back again. We heard a great many rumours about the fierce fighting that had taken place, since we left General Paget in command there. One story especially was repeated a great many times over from different sources, so that it may very likely have been true; but true or not, most of us believed it, and it cheered us all up very much. During a fight outside the town, a number of Boers crept up unseen through a field of mealies, and were so able to shoot down the gunners and drive off the escort of a couple of guns belonging to the 39th Battery; already the guns had been captured, and had been carried off out of sight behind a hill, when twenty-three Australian bushmen, hearing what was forward, fixed bayonets, and thus using their rifles like lances made a headlong charge, overtook the guns, drove off the Boers with loss, and triumphantly brought them back. That was the story as we heard it, and it filled us with enthusiasm.

We had an opportunity of hearing some more news by being sent as escort to a convoy out of Kroonstad. Once more we camped on the well-known hill, and once more suffered most bitterly from the cold, but a visit to Kroonstad was most enjoyable, for, after six weeks' constant marching and hard campaigning since our last stay there, it was like coming back to the very centre of civilisation, and it no longer seemed altogether impossible that the war should ever end. The officer in charge of our convoy on this occasion was Colonel Kekewich, the defender of Kimberley. It was curious to see quietly marching along, commanding a few companies of the North Lancashires and ourselves, the man on whom six or seven months before the eyes of England had been fixed.

No sooner had we got back to our camp than the whole column started back again to Kroonstad. We were to go back there, and entrain for some destination unknown. Some said we were under orders for home, others that orders had been given for a great review at Pretoria, in which the volunteers were to take part before being sent home; a few, in whom was truth, suggested that we were probably going to do the same kind of thing in the Transvaal as we had been doing in the Free State, and that there was no possible chance of our being sent home before the job was ended. Anyhow, whatever the cause, there seemed to be great urgency; for we rattled along, and did the whole distance into Kroonstad, about forty miles, that same day. Another phase of our campaign was over; this was about the middle of July.

CHAPTER XVI

UP TO THE TRANSVAAL

THIS time we camped just outside the station at Kroonstad. We were told we might have to entrain any moment, and it also became known that our destination was the Transvaal. At once all traces of home-sickness vanished away; everybody became very keen and excited, and a tremendous bustle prevailed. It was said at first that only those who had horses fit to go would be allowed to entrain, and those who had been footing it for the last part of the way, or whose horses were palpably unsound, were thrown into a great consternation, and were at their wits' ends to know what to do. Several horses turned up in the night in a rather mysterious manner, but as later orders were received that we were to leave nearly all our horses behind, this difficulty was got over. All that night and the next day a strong north-easter kept blowing, and we realised to the full what a horrible place Kroonstad might be. Everything was continually wrapt in a blinding yellow dust-storm; it filled your mouth, eyes, and ears; it got through your clothes, into your boots, and, of course, filled your hair, and all the time you shivered with the cold. We were told we must be ready to entrain at midnight, then the time was altered to 2 A.M.

To get out of the wind and dust I lay down in a sort of ditch, after killing a mouse or two, which seemed to like the place as well as I. At two we were roused up, saddled our horses and packed up our blankets; then we were told we were not wanted after all; at four the same thing happened, and after that we got two or three hours' peaceful slumber. It was a disturbed night for all of us, except one, who had found some friends and a dinner in Kroonstad. Forgetting the effect of dining too well after a long abstinence, he came into camp in a most cheerful, not to say insubordinate condition. After some inconsequent chatter he was got to lie down in his blankets, and once there nothing would make him get out. When orders kept coming to turn out at various hours of the night, nothing would induce him to pay any attention. "Sergeant-major! he would like to see the sergeant-major that would dare meddle with him. Officers! let them go and be hanged, and not bother him." And so through all the racket and noise of two or three saddlings and unsaddlings, he remained quite undisturbed, and came out of it much the best.

Next day we had a real hard day's work. First we had to take our cast-horses to the remount department. Then we carried our saddles and kit to the station; two or three hours of loading stores into trains followed. Then we were ordered to pack ourselves and our belongings into some trucks, about thirty-five men with saddles, rifles, blankets, &c., to a truck. Twice I packed myself and my kit into a truck, and twice was turned out.

"What the —— — are you doing in that truck? Come out at once." So out I came, was sent into another, and the same thing happened. The second time there was some difficulty in getting my kit out of the confusion. By this time officers were in a fearful state of nerves. "I'm looking for my rifle, sir." "Never mind your rifle; come out of the truck; can't you see the train's just going to start?" The train didn't start for another two hours, but I gladly parted with that part of my equipment, which I knew would have to be replaced if I could not find it again. When you have to be your own porter, the less you have to carry the better.

Never was such a Babel as Kroonstad station that day. Horses, mules, guns, stores, and men all being sent north, all struggling together and tumbling over each other. Here were a number of chattering waggon-niggers, with whatever sense they once had shaken clean out of their woolly heads; here some tall bearded Sikhs of some Indian cavalry regiment, employed in taking care of horses, perfectly grave and stately amid the din, conspicuous by their bright-coloured turbans, looking all the time the courteous gentlemen they were, yet doing their business well.

In the afternoon there were more fatigues, and a great deal of hoisting waggons on to trucks, but somehow or another the work was got through, and about 11 P.M. we started off. It was a hard day, and would have been much harder, had we not been during the latter part of it under the charge of an officer newly promoted from the

ranks, who understood very well from his own experience how to make things go easily.

The greater part of the company had gone off in open trucks, packed thirty to a truck, and a most unpleasant time they had, for they were too closely packed to be able to lie down, and had to sit just cramped up as they were. The last train-load had a better time; for we travelled in open trucks, but between the wheels of the waggons which stood upon them, and so we had a cover over our heads and plenty of room to stretch ourselves. The waggons were loaded, and on the top rode the Kaffirs. They must have been fearfully cold during the night, and they presented a miserable though comic sight in the morning, perched on the tops of the waggons like a cluster of monkeys, and wrapt in blankets of the most extraordinarily variegated hues.

How absurd it seems to be packed into a truck, and sent off to an unknown destination without any volition of one's own! Yet I look back with great pleasure to that railway journey; it was magnificent to have no horses to look after, nothing to do but lie on our backs and smoke; as we jogged steadily northwards, or stopped to have a chat with the garrison at some little railway post; once out of Kroonstad, there was none of the "feverish haste of modern days." In this pleasant fashion we were carried past the familiar scenes of the last two months, America Siding, Honingspruit, Rhenoster River, Kopje Siding, Roodeval, Vredefort Road, then up to Wolvehoek, and over the Vaal to Vereeniging. Once north of the Vaal, it was startling to

TRAIN DE LUXE TO THE TRANSVAAL.

WAITING FOR ORDERS AT KRUGERSDORP.

see that the line had not been damaged at all. Early on the morning of the second day we passed through Johannesburg, and then discovered that our destination was Krugersdorp.

One of our troopers, who was a stockbroker at home, became exceedingly excited as we approached Krugersdorp. In the early morning light he descried the name of Luipard's Vlei at a station, and when he heard that Randfontein was actually close by Krugersdorp, he began to feel that there was something more than mere names in the Kaffir circus after all. A long fatigue of unloading trucks and loading waggons in the vicinity of the Lancaster mine caused him to abate somewhat of his excitement.

We had seen nothing of Johannesburg, so Krugersdorp, compared with the agricultural Free State villages, seemed an enormous place. And, indeed, once within the circuit of the Rand it is a new world altogether. Here are all the signs of life and bustle and business, something quite beyond the ox-paced mode of living in the Free State. True, when we were at Krugersdorp, it was like a place three-quarters fast asleep; the shops were nearly all closed, the mines were lying idle, nothing in fact was going on; but it had the air of a busy place in the early morning, which might any moment wake up to its full daily activity. The great feature of the place is the quantity of Australian blue gum-trees planted everywhere, and very well grown, which give the town, otherwise parched and dusty enough, a pleasant, shady aspect. At close quarters the gum-tree is a

nasty, untidy tree, always shedding its bark, but in the mass at a distance it is very refreshing to the eyes, after the many treeless leagues of country that we had compassed. Very refreshing too, both to the outer eye and to the inward man, were the great baskets of golden oranges that some niggers were hawking about the streets.

The town itself has a good deal of the appearance of the gum-tree ; some very good buildings, and some which, if not good, are at any rate imposing ; and then a lot of shanties patched together, looking as though they had been run up to last a month or two ; then a substantial row of excellent cottages belonging to one of the mining companies ; so that from a little distance you have a fine impression, and then on closer examination you find all the evidences of hasty growth.

Krugersdorp is doubly interesting, for, besides being a mining town, it is also the very heart and shrine of Krugerism. Not far off is the spot where Jameson's unhappy raiders surrendered. Here too, just outside the town, is the monument to Boer independence, erected in memory of the magnificent occasion, when the whole of Great Britain's sea and land forces was, so the Boers thought, defeated at Majuba. This is the place where every year on Majuba Day Kruger used to address the assembled burghers. But now Majuba Day is become Paardeberg Day, and when we were in Krugersdorp there was a British sentry over the monument of independence to see that it was not defaced or injured by any rude hands. Some few English, but not many, had remained in Krugersdorp during the war. One of

these, a chemist, told us something of his experiences. It had not been a very safe or pleasant time. Not much was commandeered, but occasionally the streets would be paraded by bands of armed men, breaking the windows of the houses, and recklessly discharging their rifles. He declared that his own life had been threatened many times, and showed us a shattered case, and a hole in the wall behind it, caused by a bullet fired at him in his own shop as he stood with his back to the door.

Military administration was in full swing. The law was contained in a huge broadsheet of proclamations in English and Dutch, some issued by Lord Roberts, some by General Hunter, some by Brigadier Bryan Mahon, reliever of Mafeking, and a multitude by lesser men, commissioners of this and that. There were regulations as to the surrender of arms, the granting of passes to reside, to own a bicycle, to be out of doors after dark, to employ black servants; as to markets, and the prices of various commodities from cows to cauliflowers; regulations as to the train-service between Potchefstroom and Johannesburg and the fares to be charged; as to the time of posting letters, and a thousand other details. In the town-hall sat officers in khaki dispensing justice or renewing the weekly passes after due inquiry. All this system and organisation, though doubtless much of it was paper work (for what was the use of fixing the price of butter when none was to be had? or of announcing the railway time-table and the amount of passenger fares, when no train ever came within several hours of the advertised time,

and no ordinary passengers were allowed?), had yet a great air of permanence and finality. Had I been an armed Boer and seen it all, I think I would have laid down my arms in despair. I felt the same thing the last day we were at Kroonstad, when I was sent on a ration-fatigue. That which, when we were first there, had been a mere open dusty vacant space, was now covered with a vast labyrinth of stores. The Army Service Corps had built itself houses to live in out of its own resources. When we found our way with some difficulty to the tinned meat department, there was a man living snugly in a chamber whose walls were built wholly of bully beef and mutton tins; other parts of the same domain were made of potted ham, others of jam; an inpregnable citadel had been reared of biscuit-tins; elsewhere were stout bastions solidly composed of countless sacks of oats. And all this was no shoddy jerry-building, not a wall but was several feet in thickness; and when no chamber or passage was required, the depth of the masonry would be many yards, not feet. Who could hope to struggle against the power which could build mountains of beef and mutton? The Boers might be more mobile in the field, but what use could that be? So is a bluebottle more mobile than an oak, yet the oak holds the ground in the end. The British occupation, thus evidenced, was a solid and permanent fact that could not be overlooked or misunderstood. Unfortunately only those of the enemy who had surrendered saw these things either at Kroonstad or Krugersdorp.

Another little fact which I noticed at the same

time and place outside the palace of the Army Service Corps was strangely suggestive. The side-posts of the doorway leading into the central office, where fatigue parties had to present their indents, were composed of biscuit-tins cased in wood. On this convenient surface men waiting their turn had written their names and corps, as is the invariable custom of Tommy Atkins and many other people, when they get a chance. The result was a truly Imperial document. Here were names of men belonging to English, Scottish, Welsh, or Irish regiments side by side with such descriptions as Canadian M.R., Lumsden's Horse, Ceylon M.I., Tasmania, Burma, New Zealand, Victoria, Kaffraria, Cape Mounted Police, and many more, including cavalry, yeomanry, and artillery. If it was nothing else, that doorway was a lesson in geography.

We spent two or three days at Krugersdorp to refit. Some new clothing was very urgently necessary; a good many of us were in rags, in spite of the reinforcements provided to our wardrobes by the Roodeval disaster. I was awarded a new tunic and a new pair of breeches, but as the Government tunic has only two pockets and those small and inconvenient ones, I was very glad to return again to my torn, travel-stained, dirty and threadbare, but much-pocketed, patched old tunic. I very much regretted my old breeches also, ragged and draughty as they were, for the new ones, though stout in texture, were very ill cut and most uncomfortable. They made no pretence to fit, but unfortunately the old ones had been consigned to a large bonfire in a

moment of enthusiasm. Most important of all was the question of remounts. We were not exactly delighted when we were shown a herd of horrible Argentines, and told to catch them. The first time the regiment paraded on these animals was an occasion to remember. Mine, after cow-kicking me in the chest when I was girthing him up, behaved very fairly well; others were not so fortunate, and a great deal of cup and ball was played. They kicked a good deal in the lines; I expect their tempers had been a good deal soured by long travelling in ship and truck, but a short spell of trekking soon reduced their spirits to a great deal less than was desirable. They always remained the most odious and awkward beasts to lead.

CHAPTER XVII

CAMPAIGNING IN THE MAGALIESBERG

THE Boers had recently been very troublesome in the neighbourhood of Krugersdorp, and the garrison had had one or two smart fights shortly before our arrival. Doubtless they had been a good deal encouraged by the disaster to the Scots Greys and the Lincolns at Mosilikatz or Nitral's Nek, north of Pretoria. We accordingly marched out with the object of clearing the country. Another column from Krugersdorp under Smith-Dorrien (one of the few generals whom all men speak well of) preceded us by another route, but joined us after a time; this included the Shropshire Light Infantry and the Gordon Highlanders.

Almost directly upon leaving Krugersdorp you enter the hill country of the Magaliesberg range, which runs to the westward from Pretoria, with offshoots running a good way to the south. It was quite a different country from any we had hitherto been in; for though we had been in difficult and hilly country before, this may fairly be described as mountainous. It was also extremely picturesque, and the land in the valleys is extremely fertile. There are quite a fair number of trees and, as almost every valley has a good stream, water is in great abundance. From this district comes the

best Transvaal tobacco, and it is also a great orange-growing country; altogether in time of peace a very beautiful and desirable locality. But in war it is not quite so pleasant; among those steep and rugged mountains an enemy who thoroughly knows the ground has an enormous advantage, and the wily sniper can practise his gentle art with almost perfect security.

The first day we did not march very far, as we had made a late start; and not more than a shot or two was fired. The next two days, however, we had a great deal of stiff climbing and some amount of shooting; we kept steadily pushing a good force of the enemy in front of us. By this time we had reached the base of the main ridge of the Magaliesberg, and were marching along it in a westerly direction. The hills here are exceedingly steep, and form an impassable barrier to any army; except by one of the recognised passes it is impossible to cross the ridge. From the heights on our right we were continually sniped by small parties, but they did not do us any damage. It was pretty to see our guns occasionally replying, firing with a tremendous elevation and bursting a shrapnel right up on the crest of the hill. It was rumoured that our plan was to sweep the enemy right up into the funnel that ends in Olifant's Nek, and that here Baden-Powell, who was known to be in command of a force at Rustenburg, which is only a few miles farther on across the hills, should issue forth and fall upon them in rear. At and in front of Olifant's Nek the enemy at last made a stand. They had some field-guns and pom-poms

with them, and for a time they made a stubborn resistance to our advance. We had a long uphill attack on foot, but, as far as my own company was concerned, again escaped without casualties, though a good deal bothered by a pom-pom; other companies were not so lucky, and some very nasty wounds were got that day, men being shot lengthwise right through their bodies through being hit from above when trying to take cover. At last the enemy turned and fled; we could see their convoy and guns lumbering up the pass, and our guns poured a heavy fire upon them, which upset a waggon or two, and knocked one gun to pieces.

We were greatly disappointed to find the pass unoccupied, and thus to lose the fruits of our three days' hard work in such a difficult country. Whether Baden-Powell was or was not expected to hold it, of course we had no means of knowing, but looking only to the extreme ease with which the pass could be defended by two or three companies and a gun, we felt very strongly about it. The great B.P. did turn up from Rustenburg two or three hours after the action was over, and we heard the booming of some guns in the direction which the routed enemy had taken, but all this only confirmed us in the opinion that he might have been there before, and we were not disposed to hail his eventual arrival with any great enthusiasm. Still there was probably some good reason for it which we never heard. We went through the pass and camped a mile or two on the other side, in a wooded country near some running water. It was a glorious sight to see some great orange-groves not a

great way off laden with ripe fruit. Sentries were posted as usual to prevent any being taken; but what is the use of a few sentries against so many? Somehow or another a great many oranges found their way into camp. We spent a couple of nights in the same place without going on into Rustenburg, and then news came which made us hurry southward again toward the Krugersdorp-Potchefstroom line. Boers had appeared in that quarter, had blown up the line, and captured a train with some prisoners near Bank station.

We marched off, leaving a strong garrison holding Olifant's Nek. If it had been found possible to maintain that garrison for the nexth month there might have been a very different tale to tell of the closing operations of the war. After an uneventful march, except for one skirmish, we arrived at the village of Bank, and the enemy retired before us. From Bank the column moved down the line to Potchefstroom, and thence took part in the operations against De Wet, and the stern chase which culminated in the bitter disappointment when Olifant's Nek was for the second time found unoccupied, and De Wet once more escaped. I have heard the blame for this most unjustly laid on Lord Kitchener. In any case it was cruelly hard luck that Lord Methuen should have been deprived of what would have been so well earned a triumph.

I would not be justified in saying more about it, as I was not present myself, and have only heard since about the feelings of my comrades on the subject. If the narrator once leaves the strict and

A BIVOUAC WITH BLANKET AND RIFLE SHELTERS.

BOER REFUGEES IN THE TRANSVAAL.

narrow path of his own personal experience, I know very well into what morasses he may wander. *Ex Africa semper aliquid novi* is true enough, especially as campaigning in that country is wonderfully destructive to the memory and stimulating to the imagination. I was not present, because I had been forced to leave the column and go into hospital, and thus came into contact with that side of warfare which I least wished to experience.

I cannot believe that there is a healthier climate anywhere than that of South Africa. Until I got ill, I felt well in a sense which I had never even imagined possible before. I can give no better indication of this than by saying that when roused up from a sound sleep at three in the morning, one would throw off one's blanket, jump up, and with one shake begin work, feeling in a moment quite alert and vigorous, ready for anything, even to go into action. We would be in the saddle all day on and off, with fatigues between whiles, yet feel not a bit tired or knocked up. I believe I actually grew in height, though long past the natural age of growing. I know I put on a couple of inches round the chest, and nearly two stone in weight, and all this during a rough campaigning and many days of half or three-quarter rations. The smaller ailments of life were entirely absent. Getting ill at last was a pure accident, due to specific causes, like drinking bad water, or being poisoned in some similar manner. Even then, owing to a previous sound condition, I was able to hold out very much longer than I could have done under ordinary circumstances. Luckily I escaped enteric. It so

happened that I began to get ill and had to go on marching for about a week before I could go into hospital. It was a miserable time, but I shall never forget the extraordinary kindness of my fellow-troopers, who did all in their power to get me anything they thought I could eat, or relieve me of any work—in a hundred things they went out of their way to do what they could for me. I thought I would have been able to pull through without going into hospital, but a cold and stormy night, with torrents of rain, washed my last spirit out of me, and I was glad to seize an opportunity and be carried in a truck back to Krugersdorp. I had the good fortune to travel with about thirty of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, who enlivened the weary hours with much anecdote and song, but I was heartily glad to arrive at the station. Here it was a new experience to find a cheery orderly ready to help me into the van and take charge of my bundle of blankets, to which I was clinging like a limpet. At the hospital, after a somewhat dismal roll-call, basins of soup awaited us, and then beds, actually beds with sheets, in a large airy ward. There are people who, after long sleeping on the veldt, wrapt up just as you are in a blanket, declare that they can find no comfort in a bed under cover, but for my own part taking off my clothes and creeping in between the sheets will never again seem quite the commonplace thing it used to be.

There is no place where a private soldier is more a private than in hospital. Of course in the field, serving in an irregular corps like the Imperial Yeomanry, a trooper has by the nature of the case

more independence and liberty than the regular cavalryman, certainly a great deal more than the infantryman, who can hardly ever escape from his section sergeant or corporal at least. But once in hospital you really are all alike, and there is in fact no difference between one man and another, when all have their hair cut short and their beards not cut at all; when all are in the same degree of unwashedness, and all dressed in tattered, dirty clothes, especially if, as in my case, they happen to have lost their voice. Here you are just trooper 8008 and nobody else, and you will just have to do as you are bid; and if you are well enough you must sweep the floor, and not you, but somebody else, will decide for you whether you are well enough or not. I never was in a hospital before, so I cannot compare it. I am inclined to think that my experience in hospital was a peculiar one, but, such as it was, I got it right from the bottom.

The first day I was there we were remarkably well fed; we had excellent soups and puddings, and as much as we wished. I was a good deal surprised at this; it was not what I had expected, but the mystery was explained to me. "Don't you know that this is a Boer hospital you're in, and to-day is the last day under the Boer dietary, as run by the German doctors? To-morrow it's taken over by the R.A.M.C., and you'll soon see the difference." Next day when my diet-sheet was being made out—particular care having been taken to set down my religion—I was told I was to be on milk diet. I whispered that I thought I was capable of a little more, for milk diet means only three cups

of condensed milk and water in the day. The answer was, "No; this is your first day in hospital, and everybody has milk diet the first day." I said I had been in the day before. "Oh, yesterday doesn't count; you must be on milk diet." And on milk diet I was. Next day I was promoted to "Various," which means beef-tea and bread. Eventually comes the third stage, which is "Rations," the same for sick men and whole.

The doctor was a nice fellow, and examined us carefully as far as I could tell. I suppose it was only natural that he should be rather hasty and patronising. I wanted to ask him if there was any chance of my being moved to Johannesburg, as I had friends there. The first day I could not get him to listen at all; at last he only said, "My good man, don't you bother yourself about that; we'll look after you all right enough." It made me laugh, though I was vexed, but I realised how impossible it would be for Tommy Atkins to make any complaint, even if he thought of doing so, which he never does. The doctor made me laugh again, though I expect he would be surprised to hear that anybody saw his joke. There was a man in my ward who frankly confessed that he was "fed up"; he had had, I believe, a touch of rheumatism, but he was trying to make the very most of it, so as to avoid being sent back. He told the doctor the pain had kept him awake all night (his snores had kept me awake), and he displayed a blue mark on his back, which, he said, marked the worst place. After examining him the doctor said, "I think, my friend, you are suffering from hypochondriasis."

The orderly looked grave, and the patient pulled a long face as he answered, "Something of the sort, I expect, sir." I told the man afterwards that the doctor had been pulling his leg; but he said, "Oh no, he thinks I am rather bad."

From the patient's point of view, far the most important person is the orderly. The orderly has him absolutely at his mercy, and can easily make his life a burden to him in a hundred little ways and great ones too. The ordinary soldier, knowing nothing of hospitals and accustomed to obedience, would suffer untold things before it occurred to him to complain. If it did occur to him, and if he was articulate enough to make his complaint understood, the orderly might perhaps be reprimanded, and then would be free to take it out of the unhappy complainant. Occasionally, when I was at Krugersdorp, an important-looking personage came into the ward, accompanied by a sergeant, who exclaimed, "Any complaints?" in a loud and threatening manner. He would have been a very bold man who would have come forward then, and faced the probability of being told that he was a mere "grouser," and the certainty of making an enemy of the orderly. I do not believe that many other orderlies could have been like ours; indeed I was assured by one of his colleagues that he was known to be an exceptional man; but that such a person could be employed at all in any medical corps argues something wrong. He neither knew nor cared to know anything whatever about the treatment of sick men. Their comfort and welfare did not trouble him in the least; and this was not pro-

fessional indifference as to mere individuals, like that of an admirable and most hard-working nurse at Johannesburg, who rather horrified me by saying, "I've got a lovely case in that tent" (a man wounded in some horrible way); "I don't think he can recover." His one idea was to make the patients do as much work as he could, and to do as little himself. One was suffering from gastritis; the doctor said he must on no account get out of bed; yet the orderly insisted on his getting up to sweep the floor every morning. The same man was also ordered a cup of hot water every two hours during the day, and the orderly explained to the doctor, with a reverential salute, that he would have no difficulty in getting it; but as soon as the door was closed he went through an expressive pantomime of derision, and told the patient that he would have to go and fetch it himself if he wanted it; he wasn't going to trouble himself with walking up and down stairs for that.

One of his duties was to see that we took our medicines at the proper time, but he had no belief in doctors' prescriptions. One day he wanted me to take mine at an earlier time because he wanted to go out. I said it was too early. "Never mind," he said, "I'll just pour a little of it away; that'll do for the doctor."

At times he grew melancholy and used to speculate on what chance he had of ever seeing his missus and the kids again. But usually he was a cheerful ruffian, and would indulge in humorous comments on passing events in his own peculiar lingo; particularly he would facetiously describe the "old

woman" and her habits and his method of dealing with them, in terms which makes me think it will be a sad day for her whenever he does get back. Eventually I had a good row with him because I found him lying on my bed and he refused to get off. "Come now, matey," he said, "that's a little thing to make a fuss about;" but I was getting stronger then and less indifferent, and startled him a good deal.

Soon afterwards I was drafted into the base hospital at Johannesburg.

CHAPTER XVIII

JOHANNESBURG, PRETORIA, AND NATAL

THERE was nothing triumphant about our entry into Johannesburg. Though we did the seventeen or twenty miles from Krugersdorp in the comparatively rapid time of about four hours, it was long after dark when we crept out of our truck at the Park station, and we must have made a sorry procession, could anybody have seen us, as, with the exception of a few who had to be carried on stretchers, we staggered feebly up the lane that leads to the Wanderers' Club where the hospital was pitched, still clinging to the inevitable bundle of blankets. Once in hospital we were comfortable enough. Our tents were pitched on the football ground belonging to the club, surrounded by rustling gum-trees. We had a good orderly, and were altogether well looked after. Usually hospital is a dull place enough; you read several times over papers which are two or three years old, and stroll about in an aimless kind of way, clad in the regulation bright blue suit, with a red tie, that serves the double purpose of clothing your nakedness and making you a marked man should you venture to elude the sentries at the gate.

But at the Wanderers' Club we were particularly fortunate; there were cricket matches and a

military band several times a week, besides sports and tennis tournaments. There the rank and fashion of Johannesburg would congregate, and except for the cocoa-nut matting pitch and the cripples in the blue suits clustered on the stand, you might have thought you were at some peaceful garrison town in England. Still I was extremely pleased to be allowed to leave the hospital and go to live with some friends who had a private house. At first I think I was regarded with a good deal of suspicion when I preferred my request, especially as I could not remember the address of the house to which I wanted to go, but at last all difficulties were removed, and I emerged at one bound into another world from which I had seemed so far removed.

Of all the towns in South Africa that I have seen, Johannesburg would be far the nicest to live in. The time of year that I was there, August to September, is supposed to be the worst time in point of climate. In spite of this it was perfectly glorious. There was a good deal of wind, and an occasional dust-storm, which is very unpleasant. The nights were cold, but that is an advantage if you are living in a house, and a few tremendous showers only served to lay the dust. The days were not too warm to be unpleasant, and in the morning when you come out of your house, you feel more as though you were at some English East-Coast watering-place than in the centre of South Africa, so fresh and strong and bracing is the air.

Of course the long line of mines with their shaft-

headgears, chimneys, and tailing heaps are not beautiful, but they are not at all offensive. All the residential part of the town is very well planted and full of parks and gardens. The environs are very attractive; especially north of the town, where large plantations have been laid out, chiefly of Australian trees. From the heights on that side of the town the view is very beautiful. You look down over the woods, right away across a fine rolling country, to a distant range of hills with a bolder line rising behind them. On a clear day—and most days are clear—you can easily distinguish the forts above Pretoria, thirty miles away.

Of course Johannesburg, as I saw it, with the mines all lying idle, most of the shops barricaded, and street after street of houses standing empty, must be very different from what it is in busy bustling days of peace. Even then there was said to be still a population of 30,000, a strangely cosmopolitan crew, out of 120,000 or thereabouts before the war. Great as the changes were, there was probably none more striking in the eyes of the Johannesburgers than the British flag waving over Johannesburg, and British troops marching through the streets. The sight of a British regiment marching in parade order, headed by their band, was indeed a symbol of altered times. During my stay I used to watch them Sunday after Sunday with undiminished enthusiasm. For Pretoria had seen this sight before, but when the Transvaal was last a British colony, the site of Johannesburg was, then and for years after, a bare stretch of veldt,

whose hidden resources none knew or even suspected.

Near where I lived was the fort built by Kruger to overawe the Uitlanders. I used to go up there to hear the news and pass the time of day with the garrison. As far as forts go, it is a miserable imposture, as anybody who goes into it can see at a glance; modern guns would make a mere death-trap of it in a few minutes. But it has a fine appearance from the outside, and in old days very careful precautions were taken against the entry of any unauthorised person. Now it does very well as an armoury, and as a place to fly a flag and fire the one-o'clock gun from. It was garrisoned by the Cheshires and the East Lancashires, in whose company I passed some pleasant hours. They had a great opinion of the Yeomanry, between whom and themselves as foot soldiers there was no direct competition, but they were inclined to indulge in some friendly criticism about the C.I.V.'s. They were particularly pleased with the story (which I have heard applied to other distinguished corps) of how some C.I.V.'s were made prisoner by De Wet, who immediately presented them each with a pot of captured jam, and sent them back with a message to Lord Roberts that he might have that lot back, as often as he pleased. "I told that story," said one of the Cheshires with a twinkle in his eye, "to one of the C.I.V.'s whom I met down in the town, but he couldn't see any joke in it whatever."

Of people of another sort, officers, newspaper correspondents, mining engineers, and those French

and German residents who had stayed on through the war, the great rendezvous was the Rand Club, which set its doors most hospitably open. Though Johannesburg is not on the direct line to Pretoria from the south, it is a natural centre, and nearly every one going to Pretoria went also to Johannesburg. The consequence was a constant stream of people, from the Chief of the Staff down to a subaltern three weeks joined who knew more about it than anybody. Nearly all had something of interest to tell. Here was a group of clever mining engineers, officers in the Imperial Light Horse, who had served through the siege of Ladysmith and the relief of Mafeking; here a man just returned from the relief of Colonel Hore's gallant force at Eland's River, and another fresh from the fighting at Belfast. Round a corner I ran into a country neighbour I had not seen for years, grown up and somehow transformed into a hussar; next day a man, who I knew was a London stock-broker only last year, turned up as a major in command of a battery. Oxford contemporaries appearing disguised as newspaper correspondents, M.P.'s careless of Parliament and general elections, barristers, men of all professions and men of none, so it goes on, an almost bewildering kaleidoscope; and to crown all, various kinds of Royal Commissioners, inquiring into all manner of things.

The 3rd Cavalry Brigade came in to refit when I was there fresh from the great De Wet chase. I went to see the 9th Lancers; there were barely a hundred of them left, though some more were said to be tramping on foot in a remote part of

the country. They badly needed refitting; some of the men were wearing sacks instead of breeches, and the officers were scarcely better off than the men. Right from the very beginning of the war, in my general's first campaign to the Modder, they had been in the thick of the fighting, and they may well be proud of their record. When I saw them every subaltern who had been with them at the beginning of the war, with one exception, had fallen out killed or been sent home sick or wounded, and since then the one exception, my host on this occasion, has been severely wounded.

Johannesburg was, of course, under strict martial law, which was all the more necessary as not only were dangers to be feared from roving bands without, but also from the plots of discontented "undesirables" within. On some days it was forbidden to go outside the town at all, and shots could often be heard at no great distance. Passes had to be obtained from the military authorities to reside, to leave, to be out after 7 P.M., to be out after 10 P.M., to keep a black servant, to ride a bicycle, to drive a carriage, and the like. Some of the foreigners, accustomed to peace or the free life of the colony and Natal, were a good deal inclined to murmur against these regulations. A German mine-manager, whom I knew, was bitterly declaiming against what he called the tyranny of the British Government, as he flourished a bundle of passes in the air. He would not be appeased till I suggested that he had much better go back to Berlin, if he was so discontented. He put the passes back into his pocket-book and laughed. "Not I; there we have martial

law in peace-time, and I should require a permit even to breathe."

A good deal of the administration was necessarily rather rough and ready, and there were some amusing combinations of offices held by the same person. One major had charge of the banks, the remount department, and the liquor traffic. And once when I went with a friend to get him an order for taking cigars out of bond, we very nearly got fatally mixed up with three couples who were waiting to be married in the same office. The marriage officer also looked after the relief of indigent persons in the town, and was selling tickets for a concert to be given on their behalf.

The news we got was not all from one side. I used often to see a Boer, who had taken part in the fighting near Colesberg and also the Thaba Nchu district. When Johannesburg and Pretoria were taken he surrendered and took the oath of neutrality, thinking the war was over. He brought the news from Dutch circles, which often turned out to be strikingly accurate, but not always; one day he came in with a rumour that De Wet had got into Cape Colony, and that the Colonial Dutch had risen in their thousands. I said I did not believe the Dutch would rise again. He said angrily, "Of course they will, and how not? after that iniquitous Treason Bill." I remarked that I thought it the mildest punishment for rebellion ever devised. "Why," he answered, "it disfranchises the Dutch, and so puts them under the Kaffirs." He was a very good specimen of an intelligent Boer, and quite fair-minded in most things.

A most singular man was a German, by profession a doctor and also a teacher of music. He was a real rolling-stone and had roamed over half the world, including Russia, Japan, and South America. He was a typical German of caricature, short and fat, with a fuzzy head, long bushy moustaches, and spectacles, very excitable and guttural, and kind-hearted to the last degree. What sort of a doctor he was, I do not know, but he was a very accomplished musician. He alternated between his two professions, making the most precarious living at either. When the war broke out he was doctoring in Basutoland, but having a taste for adventure, he volunteered his services in the English hospitals. When his offer was refused he went over to the Boers, and was appointed to the charge of the ambulance with the Boer forces opposing Colonel Plumer to the north of Mafeking about Ramathlabama. He was never tired of talking about the reckless bravery of our men, which astonished him very much, and said that there had been a great deal of sickness in the Boer camp, but very few deaths. His ambulance was not at all well found, and his gutturals grew deeper and deeper as he narrated how, when he asked for supplies for the sick, he was given half an ox. He bought supplies on his own account to the extent of £17, but when he returned to Pretoria and presented his accounts with the vouchers, he was dismissed with contumely by the Boer officials, nor did he ever see again a penny of his money, and of course never received anything for his own personal

services. Naturally he had a very small opinion of Kruger.

Eventually I was invalided home, but before I went I made a pilgrimage to Pretoria. Though the distance from Johannesburg is no more than thirty miles, when you get out of the train, you would think you had travelled at least a thousand miles, so great is the difference of climate. Pretoria lies right down in a basin among the hills, a sort of sun-trap, and, especially to one coming from the breezy uplands of Johannesburg, the air seems weighted with perpetual drowsiness. I do not see how any government which has its headquarters at Pretoria can be progressive for more than a week or two, or how it can fail to come into collision with the active working mining population living in the stimulating air of the Rand. Of course Pretoria is in a very central position, and the point from which several railways radiate; it has also large public buildings, especially the Law-Courts and the Raadzaal, but in spite of all this I hope that Johannesburg will eventually be the seat of government. If the country people who have business in the capital continue to go only to Pretoria, as of course they would, they will remain entirely ignorant of the great Rand population, and the natural line of division between the mining and agricultural interest will only be accentuated. The question is not one to be hastily decided, for if, as is asserted, the country round about Pretoria is as rich as the Rand, there may be a considerable shifting of the centre of gravity.

With all the new buildings in the centre of the

town the charm of old Pretoria is gone, but the residential parts are very pretty; pleasant-looking villas stand in broad streets, well back from the road in their own gardens, which are filled with all manner of tropical plants. The surrounding scenery is extremely fine, but I was not able to see much of it, as sentries on the roads turned all drivers back before they had gone far. One or two of the best villas there were pointed out to me as belonging to Kruger's sons or sons-in-law, who had become wealthy by no apparent industry. But Kruger's own Presidency was in nowise remarkable, except for the peculiarly hideous Dopper church just opposite, and Barney Barnato's famous marble lions sleeping on the stoep.

Other sights were the Bird Cage just outside the town, where the British prisoners had been confined, and, most interesting of all, the Model School, the starting-place of those thrilling stories of escape. The place was turned into a hospital when I visited it, but the wall is still adorned with a huge grinning skeleton and a wonderful map of South Africa drawn by some captive artist. I looked with awe at the hole in the floor, where three men spent so many days in hiding—a detestable place to spend even five minutes in. At the Raadzaal I obtained temporary promotion to be a lieutenant. I was refused an order to see it, because no privates were allowed in. I thought it hard that men who had taken so much trouble to conquer the place, some even walking the whole way, should not be allowed to see it. So did the officer in charge, but those were his orders. Still he was an Australian, and would not mind pro-

moting me to be a lieutenant. So I became a temporary local lieutenant, but it was never gazetted.

In Pretoria hardly any one was to be seen except soldiers, chiefly members of the Headquarters Staff, and a newspaper correspondent or two. One other I did see, and that was Judge Gregorowski, who travelled up from Bloemfontein with his black cap all ready to condemn the raiders; he was taking the air in the cool of the afternoon with perfect ease and contentment. I was glad to have seen Pretoria, if for no other reason than that I was fortunate enough to meet a stately cavalcade with the Commander-in-Chief himself at the head of it, but it is also a good place to get away from, unless you have something very definite to do.

At last I found my face turned definitely homewards, and embarked on board the hospital train running to Durban. The journey was uneventful, although we were said to have been nearly attacked by Boers outside Standerton, of which I was profoundly unconscious until the danger was passed, but a more interesting piece of railway travelling it would be difficult to find. We stopped some little time at Charlestown, and had a good look at Majuba of ill-fated memory; then we passed through the tunnel under Laing's Nek, and wound down the steep valley into Natal. Majuba and then Ingogo, owing to the curves of the line, keep catching you up again and again, and showing themselves off from every point of view, and so down to Newcastle and the historic ground of Dundee, Elandslaagte, Ladysmith, and Colenso, and right through the Garden Colony to Durban.

The officer under whose charge I travelled had commanded the hospital train since the beginning of the war. He knew every inch of the ground and every incident of the campaign. To make such a journey in the care of such a man, at once the best of hosts and the wittiest of Irishmen, was an unexpected piece of real good fortune.

At Durban I embarked on the *Carisbrook Castle*, but, as I was by this time a free man again, without fear of corporals or sergeant-majors, I will not describe the interesting voyage round the coast, East London, Port Elizabeth, and Mossel Bay, or the glories of Cape Town and its suburbs in the spring, or the long journey home.

CHAPTER XIX

CONCLUSION

WHEN I left South Africa, it was generally thought that the war was practically over, and I expected that my company would soon follow me home. Many a wiser man was equally mistaken. It was not to be, and since then they have been constantly marching and fighting with but few intervals of repose. From Rustenburg to Eland's River and Zeerust, Zeerust to Mafeking and back, to Lichtenburg, down to Taungs, up to Klerksdorp, round about the country they have been till they are thoroughly acquainted with the south-western portion of the Transvaal. It would be a mistake to call them irregulars now; they are the veterans of many a hard-fought engagement. The other day I was looking at a photograph of the company taken before we left England. Comparing it even with the last I saw of them, the difference was extraordinary. I could hardly believe that the strong well-grown men with worn but bronzed and healthy-looking faces were the same people as the smooth-faced, inexperienced boys of the photograph.

I cannot refrain from recording two compliments which I heard paid, not to my company or regiment

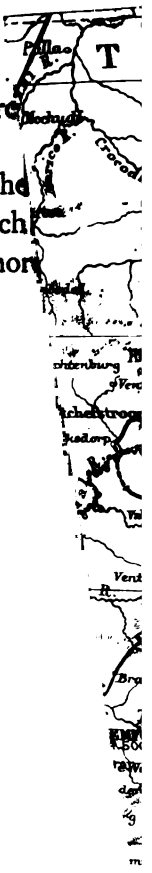
in particular, but to my brigade of yeomanry, by very competent authorities. In the first case the speaker was himself a very distinguished cavalry officer, who had seen a great deal of fighting; I asked him whether he had seen anything of the yeomanry. "I saw your lot," he said, "in action near Potchefstroom, and they did splendidly. Chesham handled them, too, very well. I would rather command a regiment of yeomanry than a regiment of cavalry any day. Of course I don't say they are perfect soldiers, but they are learning every day, and they haven't had the common sense crushed out of them."

The other was more equivocal, but a compliment for all that. The speaker was a member of the Colonial Division. "I saw a good deal of your lot near Zeerust, and a very useful lot they are. We in the Colonial Division think we're pretty smart; we think we understand campaigning and that anybody would have to get up pretty early in the morning to get round us: but when we came in contact with your fellows, *they stole our horses.*"

The company is sadly reduced in numbers; the early immunity from casualties has not been maintained. At Hartebeestfontein alone, at the end of February, in a great and successful fight against superior numbers in a strong position, four men were killed and ten wounded, out of the twenty-nine who were all that mustered for parade that morning. Since the beginning of the war they cannot have been less than sixty or seventy times

in action, and the miles that they have marc
beyond counting.

I could say much more in praise of the
after all they are my own company to which
count myself belonging, so I will do no mor
wish them well.



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